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GSAs missing from most school boards, data finds

Gay-straight alliances. Province says figures 'statistically problematic'; districts contend there are other clubs, methods to support LGBTQ pupils

On the web

For the complete breakdown of GSAs and other clubs, head to metronews.ca.

Nearly two-thirds of Alberta's school boards don't have gay-straight alliances (GSAs), according to provincial data provided exclusively to Metro. But some educators say there are other ways to provide safe spaces for students.

The figures come after Education Minister Gordon Dirks asked boards to provide the number of GSAs in their districts as well as anti-bullying and diversity clubs.

His inquiry came prior to a day of heated debate over the Tory government's Bill 10, a proposal that pre-empted one from Liberal MLA Laurie Blakeman, which would require school boards to support students wishing to establish GSAs.

In all, 23 of 40 public school boards reported having at least one GSA, while all 17 Catholic boards and the four provincial Francophone boards reported back to the province that they had no gay-straight alliances.

Blakeman said Thursday it's not surprising so many boards across the board aren't reporting GSAs, but it's a concern.

"I think it would be a lot harder for kids to ask for a GSA in a smaller centre," she said, noting some students might feel unsafe identifying as LGBTQ.

Blakeman said a lack of education contributed to the disparity of clubs throughout the province, but said she hopes once GSAs become more common in larger centres, it might encourage students to pursue their own clubs.

The province, however, contends that the data it compiled may not be an entirely accurate reflection of support for LGBTQ students.

"Some of the information is incomplete and some is out of date," said David Heyman, press secretary to Dirks. "Furthermore, there was no agreed-upon common definition for the individual clubs, making comparisons statistically problematic."

In total, 90 GSAs were reported, but exactly half belonged to the province's two largest urban public boards — Edmonton Public Schools (25) and the Calgary Board of Education (20).

The data did appear to confirm that Catholic schools don't have GSAs, causing Alberta NDP leader Rachel Notley to renew her criticism of the separate school board's stance that singling out a single group of vulnerable students isn't appropriate.

"How can you possibly stop bullying if you say to a kid that it's not appropriate for them to talk about being gay or celebrate that they are gay? That's the bottom line." JEREMY NOLAIS & LEAH HOLOIDAY/METRO

FOR MORE GSA COVERAGE, HEAD TO PAGE 4

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Thursday was a 'big day' for Mark Flores, a member of the Access Calgary Advisory Committee, and other Calgarians with mobility issues. Calgary Transit is now completely accessible. HELEN PIKE/METRO

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Release. Pay hike for non-union staff made public

Calgary school trustees went public with a plan to boost pay for a group of 200 non-union employees by 2.6 per cent.

In past years, decisions on pay for the group — which features IT workers, engineers, human resources representatives and communications officers — have been voted on behind closed doors and few details shared. But the Calgary Board of Education put out a release Thursday advertising the decision, which was voted through unanimously by six publicly-elected trustees. All told, the pay hike will cost the board $560,000 annually.

"They're a very unique set of individuals with highly specialized professional skills," said trustee chairwoman Joy Bowen-Eyre. "Sometimes, these individuals are the only one particular person (with) that particular skill set in the organization."

The pay hike will take effect Jan. 1, but will not include superintendents, whose salaries are currently frozen.

Supt. Brad Grundy said, typically, the board does pay its exempt staff more than other school boards in the province as the city's job market is more competitive.

Bowen-Eyre said the decision was difficult, given the province's gloomy financial forecast, but added "the biggest concern we've had is that we have numerous positions that are available that have been posted for a number of months that are for exempt staff that we can't fill because we're not compensating them enough."

JEREMY NOLAIS/METRO

Board says it needs 8% boost in funding

'We're concerned.'
Trustee chairwoman admits goal is lofty, as declining oil prices could reduce provincial revenue by billions

JEREMY NOLAIS
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Calgary Board of Education trustee chairwoman Joy Bowen-Eyre says she fears continued declinie in student funding. METRO FILE

Surging enrolment, rising insurance costs and a planned pay raise for teachers has Calgary's top public-school trustee making a Christmas wish for major new-year funding boosts.

Joy Bowen-Eyre said a "preliminary assessment" shows the Calgary Board of Education will need an eight per cent boost to student funding in the spring budget, but conceded that's a lofty ask as oil prices have plunged below $60 US per barrel.

"I think it's safe to say we're very concerned, given the price of oil," she said Thursday.

Last spring, in more optimistic financial times, the province did bump up overall funding for the board by $43 million — or roughly 3.6 per cent — but even then the per-student amount declined to $9,783 from $9,806. It marked the fourth-straight year that per-student funding declined for the province's largest school board — in 2011, the board received $10,077 per learner.

The struggle with funding lies largely in the surge of additional students in recent years, which could reach 4,000 additional kids come 2015-16. Covering costs for those kids alone will amount to a three per cent increase, said chief financial officer Brad Grundy.

An additional two per cent is needed to cover a planned pay raise for educators and the remaining three per cent will cover other costs.

The board, for example, has seen its insurance costs skyrocket by 89 per cent in the wake of the 2013 historic flood, some damaging snowstorms and a fire in one school.

Bowen-Eyre also noted the board has about $15 million in reserve, and for each percentage point lower that funding comes below the prescribed eight percent, the board would need to cover a $12-million gap.

Premier Jim Prentice, meanwhile, has warned that the decline in oil prices could hit provincial revenues to the tune of $7 billion next year.

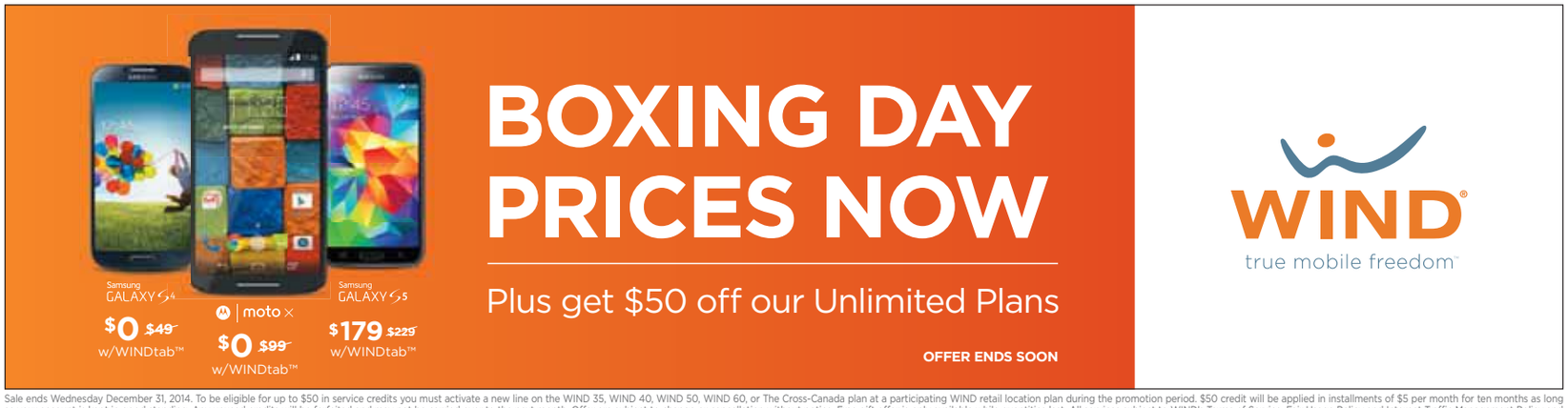
In response, at least two post-secondary schools, the University of Calgary and University of Lethbridge, have begun drafting budget scenarios anticipating funding cuts as deep as five per cent.

But Bowen-Eyre said there have been no indications of what the funding outlook could be for primary education.

Not finalized

A spokesperson for Alberta Education said the 2015-16 budget had not been finalized and "funding to school boards will be determined as part of the overall budgeting process."

"It's going to make it very difficult to plan for the year ahead, so we're out advocating right now to let our MLAs, our public, our parents, know," she said.



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Students need to steer GSA discussion, educators say

Supportive schools.
Safety key for kids from all walks of life, says principal

LEAH HOLOIDAY
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Alberta school board representatives say the future of gay-straight alliances needs to be left solely in the hands of students, as they're the ones finding value in such groups.

Provincial data shows that nearly two-third of boards across the province don't currently feature a single GSA, but principals, elected board chairs and superintendents alike agree they shouldn't be calling the shots on establishing such groups.

"Anything we do in education, we can put ideas out there, but unless the students feel the need or see some value in it, they're not going to attend it anyhow," said Dan Lower, principal at Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School in Red Deer.

The Red Deer public school district was the first in the province to run a GSA in one of its schools and Lower said it started with a few students coming forward with an idea.

"It's part of what we do as educators, help build the leadership capacity and help (students) understand ways they can do things," he said.

Red Deer currently features just one GSA for its roughly 10,600 students, but board chairwoman Bev Manning isn't worried.

"If something is needed, then the students bring it forward, but there's also a recognition by teachers who know the students well," she said.

Other educators representing one of the 17 public boards without an alliance state, simply, it's because no students have brought such an idea forward.

"That doesn't mean I haven't dealt with transgender students, gay students, all of those different minorities that are in the educational systems," said Larry Jacobs, superintendent of Wolf Creek Public Schools.

Those running schools with a full-fledged GSA say the group is purely voluntary and hardly a bother to others. Pam Davidson, principal at Springbank Community High School, which is home to one of the four GSAs hosted by Rocky View Schools, said the group operates much in the same manner as the computer club and yearbook club.

"The important piece is having them feel that they have a safe place in the building," she said. "For some of them, it's when they're toying (or) tinkering with their computer, or it's when they're online doing digital yearbook or participating in our drama club … we have lots of extracurricular ways for kids to connect in the building."

Kris Wells, advocate and director of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta, said while he finds promise in the provincial data on GSAs — there are 90 such groups in Alberta — there still needs to be more education and support for LGBTQ kids in rural areas.

"Often, (GSAs) are the only support that exists where there aren't community centres or other programs, so GSAs in rural communities are vital," he said.

At a glance

School clubs by type in Alberta:

- Anti-bullying clubs: 691
- Diversity clubs: 709
- Gay-straight alliances: 90

ALBERTA EDUCATION

Alexis Hood, left, Alex Hunt, Michel Thrun and Sam Dyck are members of the gay-straight alliance at Calgary's Forest Lawn High School, one of 90 active groups of its kind in the province. METRO FILE

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Millions may be lost in mortgage fraud

Four charged. Alberta taxpayers and banks to pay the price for scheme

HELEN PIKE
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Banks and taxpayers could be out millions after a joint police investigation cracked a complex mortgage-fraud scheme in the Calgary area.

A team effort between ALERT, the Calgary Police Service and the RCMP has resulted in charges for four individuals.

The investigation started in 2007, following the actions of an organized-crime group.

"Through the creation of fraudulent documents and companies, the accused were able to receive and obtain mortgages through fraudulent means," said Staff Sgt. Martin Schiavetta. "They were relying on increased values of the property and also drawing second mortgages and third mortgages on the property and pulling out the equity."

On Dec. 10, four arrests were made. Ricco King, 42, Farhand Sattar, 35, Jared Jenkins, 30, and Santino DiMarzo, 30, all residing in Calgary, were charged with a total of 29 offences, including fraud, money laundering and organized crime.

ALERT believes there are still more homes involved and more arrests to come. Most of the homes were found in Calgary, but properties in Fort McMurray and British Columbia are also being investigated.

Unlike other cases of mortgage fraud, this one didn't seem to target ordinary citizens, police said. Most of the "straw buyers" were people known to the accused, and the four companies the group created didn't deal with the public.

"Ultimately the victim here is the Alberta taxpayer," Schiavetta said. "Many of these mortgages were insured through the Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation."

Though it's not yet clear how much money was lost, ALERT said this instance of fraud could cost taxpayers and banks millions. Schiavetta added that the scheme could have artificially inflated property values in certain areas.

Insp. Gerry Francois, left, and Staff Sgt. Martin Schiavetta stand beside one of the seized items: a $200,000 Ferrari California, said to represent the crime group's lifestyle. HELEN PIKE/METRO

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Animal cruelty. Man who abused dog, cat to receive psychiatric test

A man who used Kijiji to find pets he methodically abused, starved and killed will undergo a psychiatric assessment before he's sentenced on animal-cruelty charges.

Nicolino Camardi, 19, has been in custody since he was arrested in May. He entered guilty pleas last week to two charges of wilfully causing unnecessary pain, suffering or injury to an animal.

The Calgary Humane Society began investigating Jan. 9 when a starved dog was found dead in a back alley with tape around its muzzle. A dead cat was found in the same area a week later with green painter's tape covering most of its face.

An examination at a veterinarian's office determined the dog had suffered chronic malnourishment before its death. The cat had been strangled and had injuries to its head, tail and hind limbs.

The Crown asked for both a pre-sentence report and a psychiatric assessment for Camardi before sentencing, which is scheduled for Feb. 26.

The request was opposed by Camardi's lawyer, who said his client has already spent enough time in custody.

Justice George Gaschler ordered the psychiatric assessment. He said he required one to help him come up with an appropriate sentence.

"He has admitted to acts with respect to the dog and the cat which can be described as torture," said Gaschler.

Crown prosecutor Gord Haight told the court he intends to seek penitentiary time for Camardi, which would amount to more than two years in prison.

He said outside court afterward that a psychiatric examination can be helpful in assessing risk.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

DISTRACTED-WALKING TICKETS A PEDESTRIAN BLAME GAME

IN DEFENCE OF
Mike Morrison
calgary@metronews.ca

In all the chaos of Bill 10, political party mergers and endless secondary-suite debates, the news that Calgarians might soon be ticketed for "distracted walking" may just be the thing that pushes me over the edge.

After voting against an in-road crosswalk-light pilot project in Kensington, Ward 1 councillor Ward Sutherland is now pushing the idea that Calgary police should be ticketing distracted walkers. This should come as little surprise, since in his first term as councillor Sutherland already struggled with other urban-friendly concepts such as secondary suites and bike lanes. And now we can add walking to that list.

Unlike the biking community, the pedestrians of Calgary have never really been that vocal, but I can tell you that it's a very scary world out there. Just last week, I was crossing at a marked crosswalk, the kind with the lights warning cars that someone is crossing. I wasn't on my phone, nor did I have my earphones in, but that didn't stop a car from coming so close to me that I could feel its 50 km/h breeze against my face. I shouted out of both fear and anger, and the car actually pulled over. The guy got out and apologized profusely, which was pleasantly surprising. Out of all the times I've almost been hit — and any regular pedestrian can tell you that it happens practically every week — no one has ever apologized. But in the days since, I kept wondering, "What if…"

What if I was paying anything less than 100 per cent attention? I could have died or been critically injured. And yes, I might have also scratched a car.

Given his ward's location, I can understand why Sutherland would be looking after the concerns of drivers, but to put most of the onus on pedestrians is truly shocking.

The car way

Perhaps what I'll never understand is why politicians, both municipal and provincial, bend so easily to the squeaky wheel. Especially when that wheel is attached to a 3,500-pound vehicle with an engine.

Whether I'm on a phone, eating, reading a book or talking to friends (any of those things easily qualify as distractions), if I get hit by a bike, car or, yes, even a train, we can't just blame the pedestrian. Or maybe we can? If Coun. Sutherland has any documented evidence that pedestrians are the cause of most of these incidents, we haven't seen it.

We live in a blaming culture, and cars are perhaps the worst at the blame game. Nothing ever seems to be their fault. We saw that with the bike-lane debate — and now we're going to give drivers even more reason to not pay attention to what's happening around them?

I'm not sure why owning a car seems to give drivers more rights than anyone else. Nor will I ever understand how owning a house allows you to decide the fate of renters or other homeowners.

But perhaps what I'll never understand is why politicians, both municipal and provincial, bend so easily to the squeaky wheel. Especially when that wheel is attached to a 3,500-pound vehicle with an engine.

MIKE MORRISON WRITES MIKE'S BLOGGITY BLOG AND TWEETS FROM @MIKESBLOGGITY

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19 TO SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

WRAP IT UP THIS WEEKEND

SHOP IN STORE AND AT THEBAY.COM
STORES OPEN EARLY
Stores open Friday and Saturday at 8 a.m.
Stores open extended hours.
Visit thebay.com for local listings.

FREE! Holiday beauty gifts from Clinique, Estée Lauder, Shiseido, Clarins and Lancôme

CLINIQUE Gift

Receive a large cylinder container containing a 4 mL mini Happy eau de parfum and a deluxe sample of Chubby Lip Balm with any CLINIQUE purchase.

A VALUE OF $16

YOUR GIFT

ESTÉE LAUDER Gift

Receive a limited edition Lip Gloss Collection, including three high-shine lip glosses and makeup bag, with any ESTÉE LAUDER fragrance purchase of $65 or more before taxes. May we suggest: Modern Muse Chic, **$66 to $115**

YOUR GIFT

SHISEIDO Gift

Receive a Perfect Rouge Mini Collection set with the purchase of any SHISEIDO foundation. Visit the Hudson's Bay Shiseido counter for a free makeup consultation.

A VALUE OF $45

YOUR GIFT

CLARINS Gift

Receive a Rouge Éclat #10 and an Eye Quartet Mineral Palette #10 with any CLARINS purchase of $75 or more before taxes.

A VALUE OF $69

YOUR GIFT

Saturday, Dec. 20, 2014

SAVE $20

when you spend $100 or more before taxes on fragrances.

Cannot be combined with any other coupons, discounts or promotional offers. Excludes Hermès.

LANCÔME Mystery Gift

A value of up to $117.

FREE: Receive a mystery beauty gift with any Lancôme fragrance purchase of $65 or more, until Wednesday, December 24, 2014.

Gift components will vary. Before taxes. One per customer, while quantities last.

YOUR GIFT

Until Wednesday, December 24, 2014

RECEIVE A $10 BEAUTY SAVINGS CARD

when you spend $75 or more in store or at thebay.com on cosmetics or fragrances.

Plus, receive this evening bag, FREE when you spend $100 or more on cosmetics or fragrances.*

See next page for details.

HUDSON'S BAY

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19 TO SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

WRAP IT UP

50% off
Fall/winter collections
by KENSIE, VERO MODA, JESSICA SIMPSON, WILLIAM RAST, BUFFALO DAVID BITTON and CALVIN KLEIN JEANS

See below for exclusions.

Featured: KENSIE ponte dress. Reg. $109 **Sale $54.50**

$69.99
CALVIN KLEIN dresses
Reg. $139 to $149
Selection varies by store.

50% off other fall/winter dresses
In our women's dress department. For the above offers, see below for exclusions.

Featured: CALVIN KLEIN sweater dress. Reg. $149 **Sale $69.99**

30% off
Watches
by CITIZEN, SEIKO, BULOVA and TIMEX

Featured: TIMEX. Reg. $85 to $95 **Sale $59.50 to $66.50**

40% off
Women's wallets and small accessories
by NINE WEST, GUESS, ANNE KLEIN and more
In our handbag department. See below for exclusions.

50% off
Diamond, gemstone, pearl and gold fine jewellery
See opposite page for exclusions.

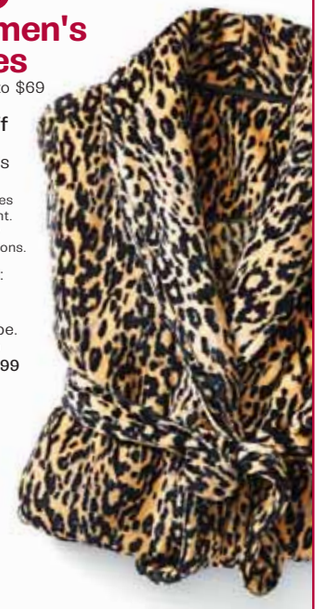
Featured: Pearl necklaces. Reg. $240 to $950 **Sale $120 to $475**

PLUS, SAVE AN EXTRA 20%
on fine jewellery when you use your Hudson's Bay MasterCard® or Hudson's Bay Credit Card.
See opposite page for details.

$19.99
Women's robes
Reg. up to $69

50% off other women's robes
In our robes department. See below for exclusions.

Featured: LORD & TAYLOR plush robe. Reg. $69 **Sale $19.99**



50% off
Women's cold-weather accessories
See below for exclusions.

$29.99 CALVIN KLEIN 2-tone fringe scarf
Reg. $58
Available in 5 colours.
Exclusively ours

We were made for this

$3.33 from the purchase of every pair of $10 2015 Red Mittens is donated to Canadian athletes through the Canadian Olympic Foundation. *Exclusively ours.*

$19.99

Introducing Maud, our 2014 limited-edition Heritage Charity Bear

100% of the net proceeds support the Hudson's Bay Company Foundation.

Savings for all Hudson's Bay offers are off our regular prices, unless otherwise specified. **Women's fashion:** Select styles available in Petite and Plus Sizes and exclude New Spring Arrivals. **Jessica Simpson, Jessica Simpson Plus Size and Buffalo David Bitton** exclude all denim. **William Rast and Calvin Klein Jeans** exclude spring/summer denim and items with 99¢ price endings. **Kensie** excludes items with 99¢ price endings. **Women's dresses** excludes New Spring Arrivals, Calvin Klein dresses Reg. $159 and up, and items with 99¢ price endings. **Women's wallets and small accessories** exclude Botkier, Coach, Cole Haan, Dooney & Bourke, Elizabeth and James, Furla, Halston Heritage, House of Harlow 1960, Kate Spade New York, Liebeskind, Marc by Marc Jacobs, McQ, Skagen and Zac Zac Posen. **Women's robes** exclude New Spring Arrivals and items with 99¢ price endings. **Women's cold-weather accessories** exclude Lauren Ralph Lauren, Lord & Taylor Cashmere, Polo Ralph Lauren, Kate Spade New York, Marc by Marc Jacobs, T&C Theodora and Callum, Burberry, Coach and items with 99¢ price endings. **FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: *Before taxes.** One card/evening bag per transaction. While quantities last. Savings card is redeemable in store from December 12 to December 24, 2014, and cannot be combined with any other coupons, discounts or promotional offers.

THIS WEEKEND

$89.99 BLACK BROWN 1826 cashmere sweaters

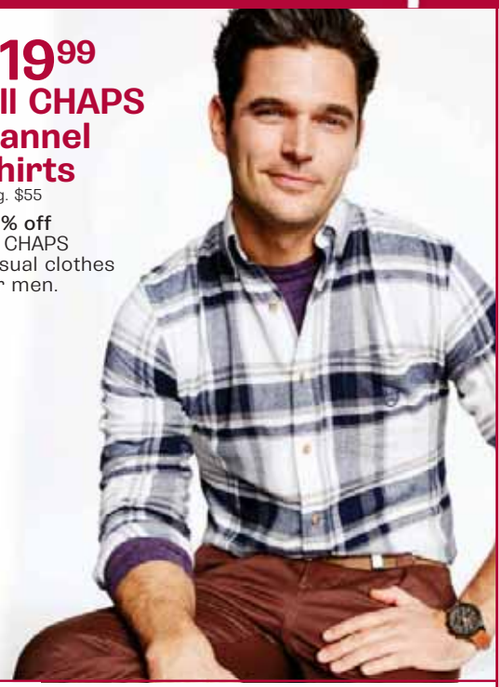
Reg. $149.99

$39.99
BLACK BROWN 1826 merino sweaters.
Reg. $69.99
Exclusively ours

$19.99 All CHAPS flannel shirts

Reg. $55

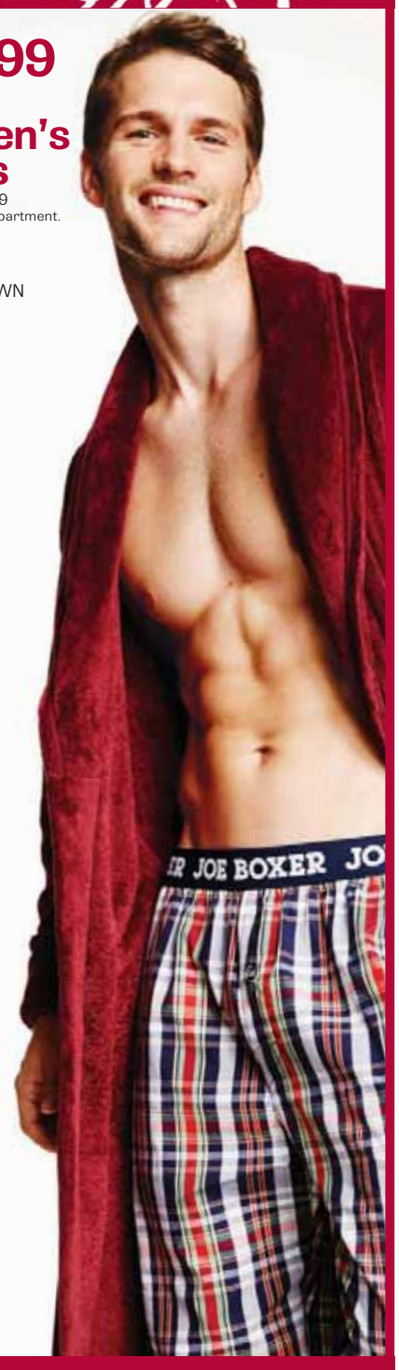
50% off
all CHAPS casual clothes for men.



$19.99 All men's robes

Reg. up to $69
In our robes department.

Featured:
BLACK BROWN 1826 robe.
Reg. $69
Sale $19.99



50% off All men's shoes by CLARKS, ROCKPORT and FLORSHEIM

Up to 65% off luggage

Select collections by SWISS WENGER, SAMSONITE, TRAVELPRO, DELSEY, RICARDO BEVERLY HILLS, HEYS, LONDON FOG, ATLANTIC, SKYWAY and TOMMY HILFIGER. See below for details.

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SWISS WENGER St. Moritz luggage
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Sale $122.50 to $162.75

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19 TO SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

20% off
BREVILLE small appliances

See below for exclusions.

Save $50
$149.99
Reg. $199.99 each

BREVILLE Cafe Roma espresso machine with bonus cups

BONUS: 2 espresso cups. **A $29.99 value.**

BREVILLE Juice Fountain Plus with bonus jars

BONUS: 2 juice jars. **A $24.99 value.**

65% off
$139.99
Reg. $399.99

LAGOSTINA
Ravenna 10-piece non-stick cookware set

55% off other cookware sets.

20% off open stock cookware and bakeware.

See below for exclusions.

60% off
$99.99
Reg. $249.99

HENCKELS
Statement 11-piece knife block set

20% off other knives, gadgets and kitchen tools.

See below for exclusions.

Save $148
$119.99
Reg. $268

GORDON RAMSAY
16-piece Bread Street dinnerware set

40% off all other GORDON RAMSAY Bread Street.

Save $40
$29.99
Reg. $69.99

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Cheers barware Sets of 4.

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50% off
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50% off
HOTEL COLLECTION

Tuxedo Black, Frame Lacquer and CALVIN KLEIN Essex bedding collections

30% off other bedding collections by HOTEL COLLECTION, BARBARA BARRY and CALVIN KLEIN.

Featured: HOTEL COLLECTION Frame Lacquer double/queen duvet. Reg. $270 **Sale $135**

Savings for all Hudson's Bay offers are off our regular prices, unless otherwise specified. **Breville small appliances** excludes items with 95¢ price endings. **Cookware sets, open stock cookware and bakeware** exclude All-Clad, WMF, Staub and Nambé. **Knives, gadgets and kitchen tools** exclude All-Clad, WMF and Global.

HUDSON'S BAY

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New tech obeys privacy laws: Top cop

Concerns over confidentiality. Commissioner has launched investigation into body cams, facial-recognition software

JEREMY NOLAIS
jeremy.nolais@metronews.ca

Calgary's top cop isn't fazed by questions being raised over whether two new pieces of technology his force is due to roll out are compliant with privacy laws.

In early November, Alberta privacy commissioner Jill Clayton announced she was probing both the body-worn cameras the police service hopes to have strapped to all frontline officers by early 2015 as well as the NeoFace Reveal facial-recognition software.

Clayton said her actions came after the police service failed to deliver a privacy-impact assessment (PIA) concerning the cameras, something that was done by Edmonton police prior to the launch of a similar program.

Asked about Clayton's investigation for the first time, Chief Rick Hanson said he believes both devices are "absolutely" within the boundaries of acceptable law-enforcement practice.

"With facial recognition, we're automating a process that was done by hand," he said. "Unless the Criminal Code, which allows us to gather fingerprints and photographs and check that against known offenders, was wrong when it created the legislation almost 80 years ago now, all that we've done is we've automated.... I think all people would say it's about time."

When it comes to the cameras, Clayton said in her letter that such technology "raises a number of privacy and access-to-information issues."

"Through deploying body-worn camera technology, (Calgary Police Service) will be collecting a significant volume of information about individuals, including information about CPS's own officers," Clayton wrote.

Calgary police demonstrated their facial-recognition system for media earlier this year. METRO FILE

"These individuals and their representatives have a right of access under the (Freedom of Information Privacy) Act for any information in the custody or under the control of CPS, including their personal information."

Hanson, however, said the service has been collecting confidential information for more than 130 years, adding "we've had to respect the balance of privacy and gathering evidence for that whole time."

He said his officers are already on camera constantly and believes the tiny shoulder-worn devices for his own officers will help balance the objectivity scales.

"More and more we're seeing situations where those that have a particular agenda will try to confront the police, try to create (a) situation and, regardless of the outcome or how professional the officer is, they will misrepresent facts to advance their particular agenda," he said.

Supreme Court

Chief lauds ruling on cellphones

Police Chief Rick Hanson is praising a Supreme Court of Canada decision giving officers the grounds to conduct a limited search on a suspect's cellphone without obtaining a search warrant.

By a slim 4-3 vote, judges ruled that such a search is warranted providing it's directly related to the suspect's arrest and that records of the search are kept.

"They are endeavouring to draw a line between when you have to take action to preserve evidence and when you have to obtain a search warrant and where the loss of that evidence will be at risk," Hanson said, adding officers are constantly receiving training around proper search-and-seizure protocol.

Tax credit. Clock ticking for last-minute donations

With less than two weeks left for Calgarians to receive something in return for their generosity this year, local charities are hoping to receive a few last-minute holiday gifts.

The deadline for the charitable tax credit, which gives money back to donors, is Dec. 31 at 11:59 p.m. According to Paul Nazareth, vice-president of community engagement for CanadaHelps, more Canadians need to take advantage of the credit.

"Canada has one of the most beneficial charitable tax systems in the Western world," Nazareth said. "But less than 25 per cent of Canadians actually file their receipts."

There are many different charities in the city in need of help, especially during the holiday season, and a lot of them have made it easy to donate by adding a link to their websites.

"There are advantages all around," Debbie Newman, executive director of the Calgary Drop-in & Rehab Centre, said. "Certainly the tax advantages ... but also to truly support the good work that's being done in the city."

The more people donate, the more they'll earn back. At $200, federal tax credit is 15 per cent, with a 29 per cent credit for higher donation amounts.

Add in Alberta's provincial credits (10 per cent at $200 and 21 per cent for anything more), and donors can be earning back up to half their donated amount.

YASMIN JASWAL/FOR METRO

Gift ideas

Calgary has a long list of registered charities in need of donations, including:

- **The Drop-in & Rehab Centre.** www.thedi.ca
- **Meals on Wheels.** www.mealsonwheels.com
- **Inn from the Cold.** www.innfromthecold.org
- **Alberta Animal Rescue Crew Society.** www.aarcs.ca

U of C bans e-cigarettes indoors, U of A follows

'Proactive step.' Other campuses not quite up to date on the issue

JEREMY NOLAIS
jeremy.nolais@metronews.ca

Classrooms and study wings are no place for the use of popular e-cigarettes, according to new rules implemented on Calgary's largest post-secondary campus.

The University of Calgary introduced new regulations in November requiring the electronic cigarettes be lit only outdoors and at least 7.5 metres away from any doorway or air vent, the same rules of regular tobacco.

Peter May, director of environment health and safety at the institution, said the move came in response to a "series of questions, queries, complaints" about the devices, which vaporize a liquid instead of burning solid material.

"We decided to take a precautionary approach until some time as we learn something more," May said.

"We think it's a good, proactive step in order to keep our campus and our campus community safe."

On Wednesday, the University of Alberta announced it too would ban the use of e-cigarettes except for designated smoking areas.

Rules on other Calgary campuses, meanwhile, still appear a tad hazy.

The University of Calgary has banned indoor use of electronic cigarettes like the one in this photo. METRO FILE

Quoted

"We are in the process of revising our tobacco-use (policy) to include e-cigarettes."

SAIT Polytechnic spokeswoman Melanie Simmons

SAIT Polytechnic spokesperson Melanie Simmons said the priority on her campus is a "safe, clean and healthy working and learning environment."

"To that end, we are in the process of revising our tobacco-use (policy) to include e-cigarettes," she said.

Mount Royal University, meanwhile, didn't provide an official stance on the devices Thursday, but minutes from a faculty association meeting in September state "the university is developing an e-cigarette policy.

"Due to lack of other spaces, use of e-cigarettes will be restricted to smoking areas."

Snow brainer

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Police hunting for 'Blizzard Bandit'

Edmonton police are looking for a man believed to be involved in what they're calling a "criminal storm" of robberies.

Earlier this year, during the city's first heavy snowfall, a man believed to be responsible for 15 robberies targeted a series of gas stations and convenience stores in south Edmonton. The man has been dubbed the "Blizzard Bandit."

The theft occurred between Nov. 6 and Dec. 14, with one robbery happening in north Edmonton.

Det. Jason Rodberg said the police are concerned someone could be hurt.

"The individual involved has no problem entering when there are witnesses or customers in the store. He pushes or shoves them out of the way, grabs onto them. He makes it very plan and clear he's committing a robbery."

"It's quite possible it's going to continue on," Rodberg said.

Public safety

"There's a lot of potential for someone to get hurt."

EPS Det. Jason Rodberg

The robber is targeting cash and sometimes cigarettes and lottery tickets.

While the robber targeted stores during bad weather, Rodberg said he's continued to commit his crimes even in mild weather.

"There's a lot of potential for someone to get hurt. He's threatening to stab people," he said.

The man is described as black, between five-foot-10 and six-foot-two and is believed to be between 20 and 30 years old. LEAH HOLOIDAY/METRO

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The same funding mechanism that helped cranes rise above Calgary's East Village could help lay LRT track to the city's southeast, says Coun. Shane Keating. ROBSON FLETCHER/METRO FILE

City considers 'tax trick' for Green Line

Report. City staff coming to councillors in January with funding options for the Green Line

ROBSON FLETCHER
robson.fletcher@metronews.ca

Calgary's long-awaited but still unfunded Green Line of the LRT could find some much-needed startup money through the same funding mechanism being used to build East Village and the new NHL arena in Edmonton, advocates say.

The planned rapid-transit route running from north-central Calgary to the city's deep southeast is expected to cost billions of dollars and so far has $52 million in annual "tax room" committed from the city over a decade — $520 million in total — but no funding commitments from the federal or provincial governments.

As councillors reviewed increasingly detailed plans this week for the eventual route of the LRT line — a project that's still likely decades from completion — Coun. Shane Keating said a community revitalization levy (CRL) remains a "viable option" to help pay for the infrastructure.

Calgary is already using a CRL to redevelop the East Village area, and Edmonton is using the same funding mechanism to build their new Rogers Place NHL arena downtown.

The approach isn't without its critics, however.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, for example, described Edmonton's arena CRL as a "tax trick" and noted the property-tax revenue used to pay off the loan would not be going into city coffers and "would have to either be made up in higher property taxes or in cuts to services" in the future.

But Jeff Binks, president of LRT on the Green, a citizen group that advocates for improved transit service, said a CRL has merit in this case as building rapid transit could spur development and redevelopment all along the Green Line route.

"Council should be looking at it as more than just a transportation project," he said. "It's also a community-revitalization project, which of course ties into using a CRL-style funding mechanism to get it going."

What is a CRL?

In essence, a CRL sees the city pay for a project up front by borrowing against the value of the anticipated increase in property values the project would bring, then pay back the loan with the actual property tax values when they're realized, typically over a period of decades.

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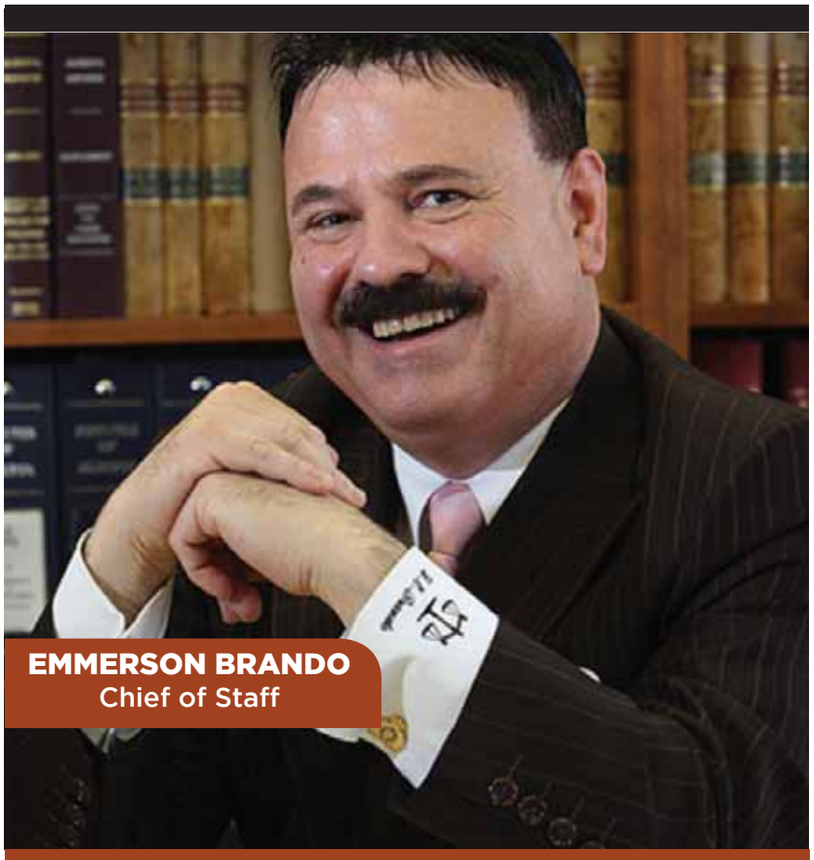

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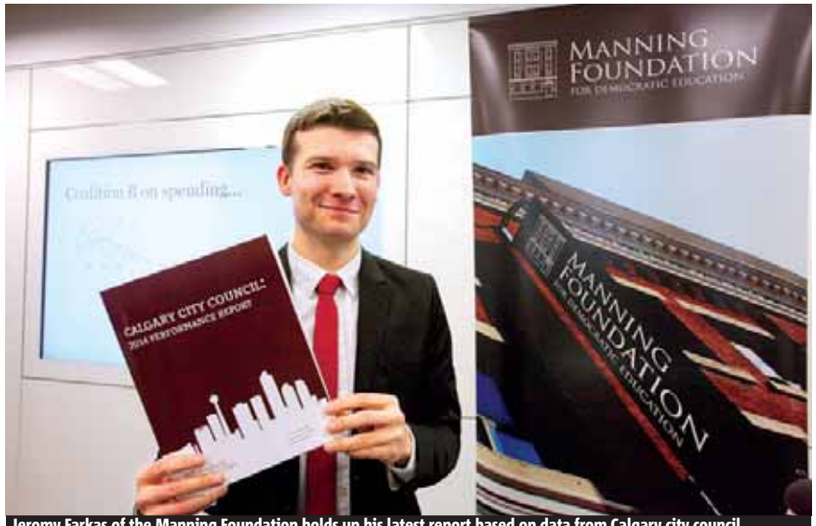

Jeromy Farkas of the Manning Foundation holds up his latest report based on data from Calgary city council meetings. ROBSON FLETCHER/METRO

Suite issue takes up most time: Report

CouncilTracker.ca. Manning Foundation data shows secondary suite applications occupy more time than any other city issue

ROBSON FLETCHER
robson.fletcher@metronews.ca

Individual secondary suite applications have consumed more of city council's meeting time than any other issue over the past seven months, according to data in a new report compiled by the Manning Foundation.

One meeting in particular, on Oct. 6, saw 46.7 per cent of council's total time spent deliberating taken up by secondary suites.

The June 9 meeting, meanwhile, saw 33 per cent of time spent handling secondary suite applications, while 27.2 per cent of the Sept. 8 meeting was devoted to the topic.

That doesn't include time spent discussing secondary suite policy, noted report author Jeromy Farkas.

"This is the time that is being taken up discussing individual homes," Farkas said. "This is more than any other issue, and we just want to draw some attention to that."

The report also broke down how long individual applications took for council to decide upon.

Most applications in 2014 were handled in 20 minutes or less, while a handful took 30 to 45 minutes. The longest was for an application in North Haven that took two hours of deliberation, and was ultimately rejected.

"The longer debate goes on, the less likely it is that a secondary suite will be approved," the report notes. "Applications that take longer than 30 minutes have only a 50 per cent chance of succeeding."

Paul Fairie, a professor of municipal governance at the University of Calgary, said it's rare in other jurisdictions for secondary suites to require approval, one by one, by elected officials, who typically have more pressing matters to attend to.

"Calgary's current approach is pretty unusual for larger cities," he said.

More data from the Manning Foundation on city council is available at CouncilTracker.ca.

Shannon Madill (Burgess). Photos not related to missing woman case: Police

Police have determined that two photos found posted to trees in a southeast park are not linked to the disappearance of Calgary actress Shannon Madill (Burgess).

Photos have been linked to an art project and police are ruling out any connection to the missing person case.

On Tuesday a family member was told the photos had a resemblance to the woman, but could not be linked directly to her because hair and flowers obscured her face.

She was last seen Nov. 27 at her home in the 1900 block of Spiller Road SE.

Police have said it's out of character for her to not contact family over such an extended period.

This week, police had been alerted to two photos found posted to trees on Fish Creek Park.

Police said the photos depicted a woman with red hair, but have since ruled out that the photos are connected to their investigation. METRO

Missing actress Shannon Burgess CONTRIBUTED

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- Saddletowne Circle
- Shawnessy Village
- Southcentre Mall
- Sunridge Mall
- Westbrook Mall – Kiosk

CANMORE
- 105–802 Bow Valley Trail

EDMONTON
- 17551–100th Ave. N.W.
- 14822 Stony Plain Rd.
- 18559 Stony Plain Rd.
- Abbottsfield Shoppers Mall
- Bonnie Doon Shopping Centre
- Christy's Corner
- Currents of Windermere
- Edmonton City Centre
- Kingsway Garden Mall
- Londonderry Mall
- Meyokumin Retail Centre
- Mill Woods Town Centre
- Namao Centre South
- Northgate Centre
- Oliver Square
- RioCan Meadows
- South Edmonton Common
- South Park Centre
- Southgate Mall – Kiosk
- Terra Losa Shopping Centre
- West Edmonton Mall
- Westmount Centre – Kiosk

FORT MCMURRAY
- Clearwater Landing
- Peter Pond Shopping Centre
- Stoneycreek Village

GRANDE PRAIRIE
- Prairie Mall
- South 40 Shopping Centre

LETHBRIDGE
- Centre Village Mall – Kiosk
- Lethbridge SmartCentres
- Park Place

LLOYDMINSTER
- Lloyd Mall

MEDICINE HAT
- Carry Drive Plaza
- Medicine Hat Mall – Kiosk

PEACE RIVER
- 10032–100th St.

RED DEER
- Bower Place
- Parkland Mall
- Southpointe Common

ROCKY VIEW
- Crossiron Mills Mall
- Crossiron Mills Mall – Kiosk

SHERWOOD PARK
- Emerald Hills Centre
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Six months later

Still no standard for ambulance response

Six months after the then-health minister ordered AHS to set a standard for ambulance response times, no standard has been set.

In response to a Metro story in June, then-minister Fred Horne ordered AHS to come up with a benchmark that could be used to gauge whether ambulance service was meeting targets.

AHS chief paramedic Darren Sandbeck said they're still researching what would be appropriate as a target, which he said isn't an easy number to determine.

"Currently, there's no accepted Canadian response-time target, so we're working away on that and will continue our work on that," he said.

While eight minutes, 90 per cent of the time is a commonly used standard, Sandbeck said it's not the best approach.

"That is really a benchmark that is about 40 years old and that doesn't take into account any of the advancements in clinical care," he said.

AHS concluded a deal this week with the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, the union representing paramedics, but the group's president said the deal does not include anything on response times, which paramedics want.

"They really want some measurable standards to go for and they're frustrated by the fact they seem to be getting put off," said Elisabeth Ballermann.

According to the most recent stats from October, ambulances are responding within 12 minutes, 90 per cent of the time in Edmonton.

RYAN TUMILTY/METRO IN EDMONTON

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EMS campaign for new, better representation

Unsatisfied. Online petition has garnered over 850 signatures

HELEN PIKE
helen.pike@metronews.ca

A number of Alberta EMS workers unsatisfied with their representation by their current union have launched an online campaign and petition to form their own representative body and address growing concerns.

A petition started Dec. 8 details Alberta EMS workers' continued disappointment with their union, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA). The document explains issues of morale and loss of professional culture and suggests the creation of a legislated fifth functional bargaining unit.

"We believe HSAA has been unwilling to call for these advancements for fear of EMS taking work away from other HSAA members and disciplines," reads a Facebook post on Paramedics Representing Paramedics. "We believe this is a conflict of representation."

As of Dec. 18, the petition, which protects signatories' anonymity, has more than 850 signatures. The HSAA represents about 17,000 members, of which about 3,000 are EMS workers.

Elisabeth Ballermann, HSAA president, said they were aware of the petition and not surprised.

"The sentiments are not particularly new," Ballermann said. "(Eight hundred and fifty) out of 3,000 isn't a majority; it's definitely a significant enough number that we obviously need to be aware of and pay attention to."

About six years ago, legislation changed, and paramedics were lumped under the representation of HSAA along with numerous other health professionals in the province.

The petition's creator, Ryan Courtney, said in an email statement he created the movement to explore an alternative labour arrangement.

"EMS professionals work in a very difficult and unique environment that encompasses both public safety as well as health care," Courtney wrote.

"We feel that this alternative labour arrangement which better represents the needs of EMS professionals will result in an improved level of care for Albertans."

HSAA just signed a new provincial collective agreement with Alberta Health Services. The ratification was 71 per cent in favour, a number Ballermann said is one of the lowest the union has seen. In her opinion, it was a reflection of the members' sentiments.

Ballermann said a separate bargaining unit is being discussed with the board of directors, but even if there is an agreement, the HSAA would have to lobby to change legislation before paramedics can be independently represented.

Meeting

MLA Rick Fraser, who is still a certified paramedic and reports to the health minister as a legislative secretary, said there was a meeting between the members petitioning, the HSAA and Stephen Mandel about a week ago.

- "This has been raised by the floor staff," said Fraser. "I think they've got valid arguments, but we'll have to look at the legislation and see how this works and how this fits."

Alberta EMS workers are looking for different union representation. METRO FILE

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Wildrose MLAs talked to Manning before quitting

Defections. Nine MLAs, including leader Daniel Smith, quit the party in a stunning move Wednesday

ROBSON FLETCHER
robson.fletcher@metronews.ca

Reform Party founder Preston Manning was called in to counsel the Wildrose caucus ahead of the decision of most elected members to abandon their party and join the governing Progressive Conservatives, but he says he didn't urge them to go one way or the other.

"I was invited to meet with the Wildrose caucus on Tuesday when they were deliberating all of this and asked to share the experience from the Reform Party in the federal arena because there were some parallels," Manning said Thursday, referring to the unite-the-right movement of the late 1990s that led to the creation of the Canadian Alliance in 2000 and ultimately the Conservative Party of Canada in 2003.

Manning said he told the Wildrose members they "should take pride" in forcing "more principled leadership" from the PC government and for earning more than 400,000 votes in the last election but noted the political and economic landscape has shifted since then.

He said he advised them to "keep in mind the big picture" as they contemplated the future of their party and their own careers.

"Alberta is headed into some rough waters with the decline in oil prices, and now is the time for Albertans to pull together no matter what their politics are, and particularly for conservatives to pull together," Manning said he told the Wildrose MLAs. "Of course, they could interpret that as pulling together within the Wildrose caucus or pulling together with the government."

Manning said most of the caucus was present for the conversation, some participating by phone.

Preston Manning in his office at the Manning Centre in downtown Calgary. ROBSON FLETCHER/METRO FILE

Democracy. Student calls for Danielle Smith recall

It's not even a day old, but a co-creator behind a website and online petition calling for a recall vote of ex-Wildrose leader Danielle Smith says hundreds have already joined her cause.

Like many political watchers, Caitlyn Madlener has watched in awe this week as nine Wildrose MLAs, including Smith, crossed the legislature floor to join long-time rivals with the Progressive Conservatives.

The move had been rumoured for days and was made official Wednesday.

"If you're going to be the Official Opposition leader, you have to really want to take down the government," Smith told reporters. "I don't want to take down this premier; I want this premier to succeed."

But Madlener, a third-year University of Calgary political-science student, was quick to point out that Smith heavily criticized the moves of two previous MLAs who crossed the floor weeks prior, including close friend Kerry Towle.

Madlener said the move, as she sees it, is based on political payoff and called on Smith to back up past statements she's made about political accountability.

"Before, she said she believed in recall votes and being able to recall politicians, and we believe she should stick to those principles and allow her constituents to go into a byelection and decide whether or not they want to see her in power," Madlener said.

As of 11 a.m. Thursday, Madlener said more than 300 had signed her petition. She launched a similar effort to preserve Alberta's licence plate earlier this year.

"We've been getting a lot of support. I think there's maybe been one or two people that weren't impressed," she said.

The petition can be signed at recalldanielle.ca. METRO

Former Wildrose leader Danielle Smith and Premier Jim Prentice. JASON FRANSON/THE CANADIAN PRESS

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NE123P114

City eyes parking plan for downtown, suburban drivers

Consolidated strategy. Plan calls for parking policies to be brought under one umbrella

Calgary is pressing ahead with plans to integrate its various parking services that could see more parkades built in suburban areas near major transit stops in addition to "park and walk" lots just outside the downtown core.

Members of city council endorsed the idea at a committee meeting this week, which is to be formulated in more detail next year and see a possible bylaw change in 2016 or 2017.

City parking strategist Eric MacNaughton told members of council the basic idea is that "we intercept the traffic further out … and then bring the commuters into the downtown on transit."

Coun. Jim Stevenson said he'd be happy to see "two or three or four of those locations throughout the city, where people would pay for parking there and then take an express bus" to the downtown core.

MacNaughton said similar facilities could be built slightly closer to the core, without the need for transit.

"We could also look at what you might call park and walk sites in some of the BRZ (business revitalization zone) areas close to the downtown."

The sites would be pay-per-use.

The overarching plan is to "consolidate" the city's parking operations to include Park and Rides, downtown parking, and parking at transit-oriented developments, in collaboration with the Calgary Parking Authority.

ROBSON FLETCHER/METRO

The city is looking to integrate more of its parking operations in collaboration with Calgary Parking Authority. METRO FILE

'Please come forward'. Family pleads for info on city's 27th murder

Family members of Calgary's 27th murder victim of 2014, Jason Quinn Antonio, released statements on Thursday pleading for the public's help in furthering the investigation into his death.

Antonio was shot on the morning of Oct. 4 on the 300 block of Manora Cr. N.E.

He was taken to hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

The investigation into his murder is still ongoing, but there is currently no new information.

Antonio's daughter and mother released separate statements through Calgary police, and both asked for anyone with information involving his death to come forward.

"Me, being his daughter, feel like my heart is broken," Antonio's daughter said in her statement.

"If anyone has any information on what happened to my dad, please come forward because he did have a family that he was taken from too early." METRO

Contact police

Anyone with any information on the shooting is asked to contact police at 403-266-1234 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477.

Quoted

"Being his daughter, (I) feel like my heart is broken. If anyone has any information on what happened to my dad, please come forward because he did have a family that he was taken from too early."

Jason Quinn Antonio's daughter said in a statement

Cochrane

Arrest made after cabbie robbed at knifepoint

Cochrane RCMP have arrested a man who robbed a cab driver at knife point yesterday evening.

The man hired a cab to take him from Calgary to the Stoney First Nation around 6:30 p.m.

Once he arrived at his destination, he told the driver that he would return from his residence with the cab fare.

According to police, when he came back, the man had a knife and demanded money from the driver.

He proceeded to threaten and chase the driver around the vehicle, before entering the cab and driving off, leaving the driver behind.

Cochrane RCMP responded, and with the public's assistance, found the man and vehicle on a driveway of another residence on Stoney First Nation.

The man was arrested, and charges are pending for robbery, impaired care or control of a motor vehicle, and two counts of breach of recognizance. METRO

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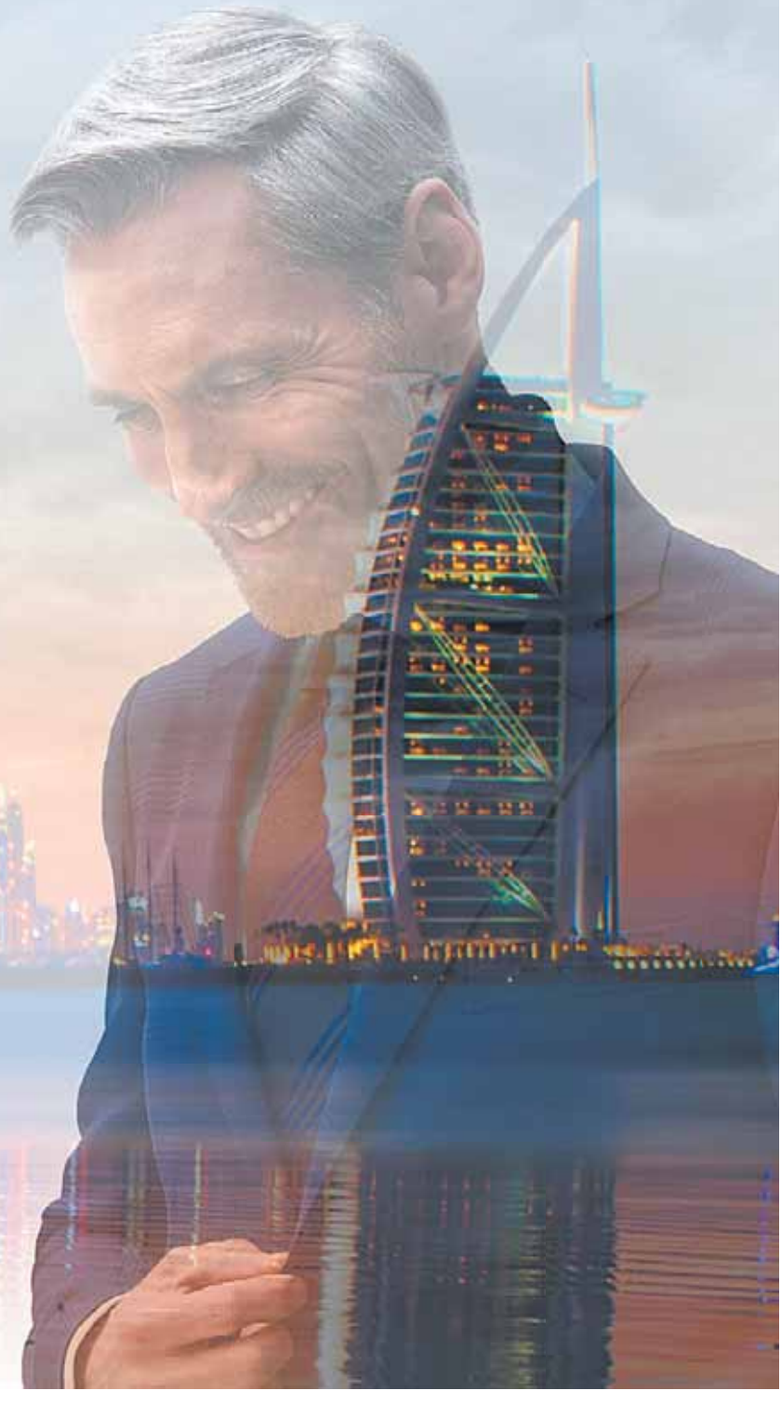

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June 2010. Woman gets 90-day sentence for fatal crash while helping ducks

A widow whose husband and daughter were killed when their motorcycle crashed into a woman's car as she helped ducks on a highway is satisfied with the accused's 90-day jail term.

Besides the detention, Emma Czornobaj must do 240 hours of community service and is prohibited from driving for 10 years.

She will serve the jail sentence on weekends.

After Czornobaj stopped her car in June 2010 to rescue ducklings on the side of the highway, the motorcycle carrying Andre Roy and his teenager daughter Jessie slammed into her vehicle. A jury convicted her of two counts of criminal negligence causing death and two counts of dangerous driving causing death.

Pauline Volikakis, the wife and mother of the victims, says the family was hoping for a significant sentence and got it.

She told reporters outside the courtroom she's happy the family can turn the page and move on with a positive attitude instead of a negative one. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Emma Czornobaj
RYAN REMIORZ/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Mathemagician M.C. Escher on display at National Gallery

A reporter looks at an artwork by artist M.C. Escher on display at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa Thursday, during a media preview of M.C. Escher: the Mathemagician. The show runs from Saturday to May 3, 2015. The pieces pictured are Sky and Water I, left, and Metamorphosis (Bees), right. SEAN KILPATRICK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

4,600 on organ wait lists. Just one-third of eligible donors donate: Report

While thousands of Canadians wait for transplants that could alter or save their lives, many potentially willing organ donors are never identified or don't make it through the complex donation process, says a report by the Canadian Institute for Health Information released Thursday.

"We know that each year, more than 500 Canadians who die in hospital donate their organs," said Kathleen Morris, director of health system analysis at CIHI. "What we found, using very conservative estimates, is that only about one-third of people who are clinically eligible to donate an organ actually become a donor."

The report said there are untapped donors among deceased patients over age 60 and among those with irreversible brain damage who are declared dead after their heart stops — called donation after cardiocirculatory death, or DCD.

CIHI said there are more than 4,600 Canadians on waiting lists for a kidney, liver or other organ transplant, and hundreds on the lists die each year because no suitable donor organ becomes available. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Feds confirm plans for wireless auction

Attracting more carriers. Forthcoming wireless auction will reserve much of new spectrum for carriers other than the Big Three

The federal government confirmed Thursday that a forthcoming wireless auction will reserve more than half of the new spectrum for carriers other than the Big Three — Rogers, Bell, and Telus.

Industry Minister James Moore released the details for the auction of AWS-3 spectrum, or advanced wireless services, which is scheduled to begin March 3. The final technical document largely mirrored what the government had already foreshadowed during consultations. Most notably, 60 per cent of the available spectrum will be reserved for smaller carriers, while the remaining 40 per cent will be available to all applicants.

Moore lauded Canada's three major carriers for providing world-class service, but he said consumers need more competition.

Previous auction

Earlier this year, the government held an auction of prime 700 MHz spectrum, which raised $5.27 billion.

The government has been attempting to use its wireless auctions to foster competition, but new entrants have struggled and the three national carriers continue to represent 90 per cent of Canada's wireless customer base.

Moore confirmed the AWS-3 auction will maintain the same opening bid prices that were announced earlier this year. Industry Canada says it would raise $162.45 million from the auction if it receives just the minimum bid for each parcel of wireless spectrum.

The minister also used Thursday's announcement to reveal several other measures intended to increase capacity, including a contentious plan to allow mobile service on a band used by rural wireless Internet service. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Tories, NDP consider federal fallout from Alberta's political earthquake

Federal Conservatives say they're gobsmacked over the political tectonic shifts in Alberta this week, but they don't have to reach too far into their own history to see parallels with the political pragmatism that's at play.

Wildrose Party Leader Danielle Smith crossed the floor this week with eight MLAs to join the majority Progressive Conservative government. Federal members of Parliament — many of whom supported Wildrose — were caught off guard by the move.

Some observers have pointed to Wildrose's disappointing showing in recent byelections as the catalyst for her startling decision.

And so it was in 2003, when a relatively new Canadian Alliance Leader Stephen Harper lost a key byelection to the Progressive Conservatives, who were in fifth place nationally at the time.

Harper spent countless hours campaigning with the candidate to no avail. Harper's spokesman, Jason MacDonald, suggested Wednesday that Smith's move had the PM's approval. Harper has dissuaded his MPs from campaigning for one Alberta party or another.

NDP MP Linda Duncan said the fact Prentice took in nine MLAs from the right-wing Wildrose party suggests his party is not progressive.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Laura Miller, who was former Ontario premier Dalton McGuinty's chief of staff, is seen in an undated Facebook photo with Peter Faist, who police allege was paid $10,000 in 2013 to erase Ontario government hard drives in the midst of an investigation over the controversial cancellation of an expensive gas-plant project. FACEBOOK.COM

Liberals paid expert to wipe drives: OPP

McGuinty era.
Top aide's spouse paid $10,000 to wipe computer hard drives in McGuinty's office, court documents allege

The Ontario Liberal caucus paid the spouse of a top aide to Dalton McGuinty $10,000 to wipe computer hard drives in the premier's office, police alleged in court documents released Thursday.

The information used by Ontario Provincial Police to obtain a search warrant that was executed in November at a provincial government cyber security office in Toronto was made public after media lawyers requested it be unsealed.

The warrant is part of an OPP investigation into deleted documents on the Liberals' decision to cancel two gas plants prior to the 2011 election, at a cost to taxpayers of up to $1.1 billion.

Computer expert Peter Faist was asked by his spouse, Laura Miller, "to wipe off personal data on approximately 20 desktop computers in the premier's office," alleges Det.-Const. Andre Duval in his application for the warrant.

"Faist was under the impression that Cabinet Office was aware of his presence and the work requested of him," wrote Duval. "He was paid an amount of $10,000 by the Liberal caucus for his work."

Miller was McGuinty's deputy chief of staff under David Livingston, who is being investigated by the OPP for alleged breach of trust. No charges have been laid, and Livingston says he has not done wrong.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

June 2010-March 2014

Documents show Faist's company was paid $224,000 by the Ontario Liberal Party and the Liberal caucus service bureau between June 2010 and March 2014.

- Search warrants served last month sought the entire email boxes for Livingston and Miller.

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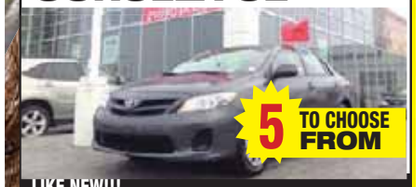

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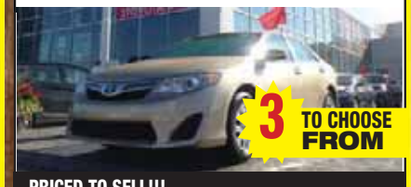

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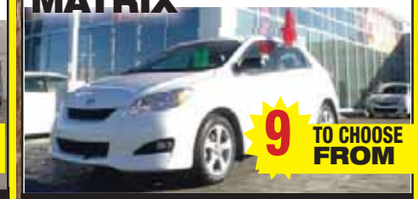

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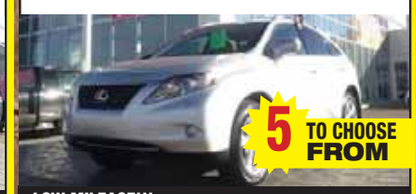

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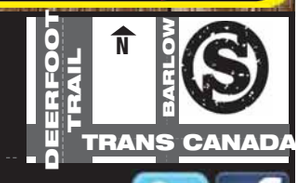


U.S. incentive plan may alter economics of Ebola vaccines

Dangling a carrot. Pharmaceutical companies now eligible for priority review

Earlier this week, U.S. President Barack Obama signed into law a piece of legislation that may significantly change the economics of making drugs or vaccines to protect against Ebola and other viruses in its deadly family.

And it might at some point provide a windfall for Merck, the company now developing an Ebola vaccine designed at Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.

The bill — S.2917, also known as Adding Ebola to the FDA Priority Review Voucher Program Act — dangles a sizable carrot meant to entice pharmaceutical companies to develop vaccines and therapies to prevent or cure infection with the virus and other related pathogens in the filovirus family.

Companies that manage to license an Ebola therapeutic in the United States are now eligible for a priority review voucher from the Food and Drug Administration, which is in effect a promise from the agency that it will swiftly process a future drug or vaccine approval application.

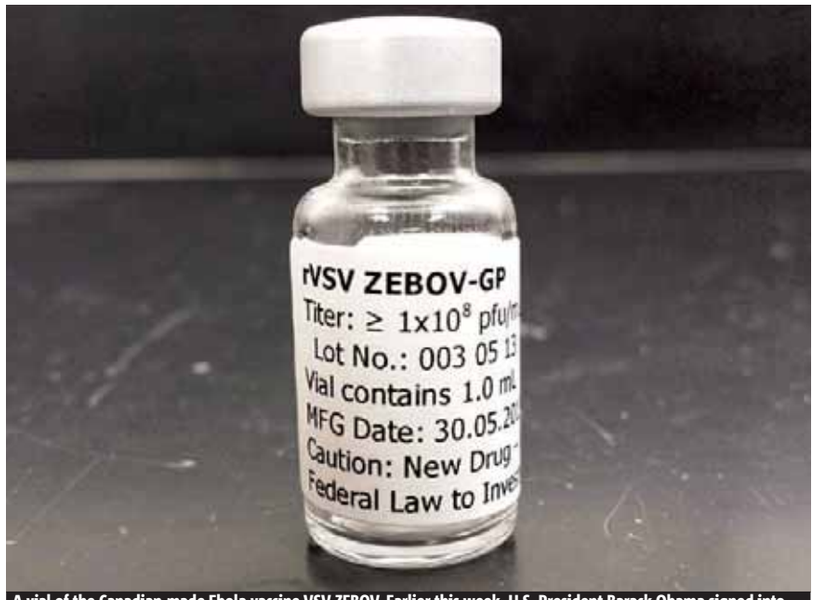
"If they get a priority review voucher, they could totally get more than that," said Judit Rius Sanjuan of Medecins Sans Frontieres (also known as Doctors Without Borders).

How much? The value of a priority review voucher isn't fixed. If it is sold, the price really depends on what interested buyers are willing to pay.

But last month, a Montreal company called Knight Therapeutics, sold a priority review voucher for a cool $125 million.

A priority review voucher guarantees that the FDA will fast-track a decision on a licensing application for a drug or vaccine, processing it within six months. The voucher doesn't assure approval; that has to be earned with safety and efficacy data.

But a product that does receive expedited approval gains more time on the market while under patent protection, which has enormous value. Likewise, for a manufacturer who knows a competitor has a similar product in the pipeline, getting into the pharmacies first could mean big earnings.



A vial of the Canadian-made Ebola vaccine VSV-ZEBOV. Earlier this week, U.S. President Barack Obama signed into law legislation that may change the economics of making drugs to protect against Ebola. THE CANADIAN PRESS

The diseases covered by the program include some rare conditions that affect children and a number of what are often called neglected tropical diseases — such as leprosy, malaria and schistosomiasis, which is an infection caused by parasitic worms.

The neglected diseases are conditions that plague the world's poor, who have no capacity to pay for expensive therapies. Developing new drugs or vaccines costs billions of dollars; if those costs can't be recouped through sales, pharmaceutical companies steer clear.

This program is meant to alter those economics.

"It's kind of an interesting concept," says Rachel Cohen, regional executive director for North American for the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative, also known as DNDi.

"It rewards companies or at least in theory it's supposed to reward companies for investing into neglected disease research by offering a voucher that can be used to fast-track approval of a drug that is actually of commercial value to the company."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Merck

- In late November, Merck bought the licence to develop the Winnipeg Ebola vaccine for $50 million from NewLink Genetics, which acquired it in 2010 for $205,000.
- A priority review voucher would likely be worth more than double Merck's outlay, say those watching the program to see if it leads to the advances it is meant to inspire.

CF-18s bomb enemy targets in Iraq to help break siege

RCAF CF-18 Hornets CONTRIBUTED/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Canadian warplanes have been in action in Iraq once again, bombing enemy targets ahead of Kurdish Peshmerga forces, who are pushing to completely break the siege in the Sinjar mountains.

The region along the Syrian border was home to many members of the Yazidi minority before extremist fighters swept in last August, killing or abducting hundreds and prompting tens of thousands of refugees to flee.

Col. Dan Constable, the commander of Canada's task force for the Iraq mission, says two CF-18s bombed an enemy position about 100 kilometres northwest of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city.

The extremists had erected "defensive fighting positions and safe havens, places where they can engage from," Constable said in a teleconference from an undisclosed base in Kuwait. "We were requested to take those fighting positions out."

It is part of a stepped-up air campaign by the U.S.-led coalition battling militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The coalition carried out 61 strike missions from Dec. 15-17.

Since beginning combat operations in late October, the CF-18s have flown a total 130 sorties and carried out nine bombing runs.

The Peshmerga, according to local media reports, launched a two-pronged assault on the region Wednesday and claimed some success with the apparent liberation of three villages.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

The days ahead

- Iraqi forces have, for the most part, been tied up safeguarding an annual Shiite pilgrimage.
- Now that it's over, they are expected to begin trying to retake territory from ISIL fighters.
- Canada's combat mission in Iraq is due to expire in April.

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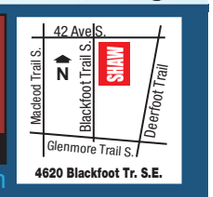

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Escape. Kurdish forces, battling ISIL, open a key corridor for Yazidis

Iraqi Kurdish forces battling Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants managed to open up a key corridor on Thursday so that thousands of people from the country's Yazidi minority who have been trapped on a mountain can flee, said a senior Kurdish official.

The development was an incremental step in the battle to retake the town of Sinjar, at the foothills of the mountain of the same name, which fell to ISIL in early August.

The Kurdish Peshmerga troops, backed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes, launched the operation to retake Sinjar on Wednesday.

Masrur Barzani, chancellor of the Kurdistan Region Security Council, said the Kurdish forces advanced in battle, establishing the passageway to the mountain on Thursday. He emphasized that Iraqi forces were in no way part of the operation.

"We asked the Iraqi government to provide the ammunition needed for this operation. Unfortunately they did not send the ammunition, and their contribution was nothing, to be quite frank with you," Barzani said in Dohuk, in Iraq's Kurdish region.

Tens of thousands of Yazidis became trapped on the mountain in early August when the ISIL extremists captured the towns of Sinjar and Zumar, prompting the exodus. Many were eventually airlifted off the mountain or escorted by a passageway through Syria back into Iraq, where they found refuge in the Iraqi Kurdish semi-autonomous region. But thousands remained stuck on the mountain. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Central African Republic. Religious clashes kill 28

Clashes in Central African Republic between Muslim and Christian fighters have killed 28 people, left dozens wounded and sent civilians fleeing for safety, a Red Cross official said Thursday.

The fighting began Tuesday in Mbrès when a member of a Christian militia was killed by a grenade allegedly thrown by a group of Muslims, according to a pastor in the town.

The violence escalated when Christian fighters counter-attacked and members of the country's Muslim rebel alliance arrived from a nearby town to join the melee.

Ahamat Ibrahim Nedjad, a spokesman for the Muslim fighters, confirmed the clashes but said his group was attacked first and fought back.

Gunfire could still be heard on Thursday morning. The town largely emptied out, with civilians fleeing their homes for the bush and local officials taking shelter in another town, the pastor said.

He spoke on condition of anonymity, citing fear for his safety.

The fighting killed 28 and wounded dozens, said the Red Cross official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the news media. He said 70 homes were burned. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pakistan condemns, mourns loss of children

A Pakistani child attends a protest on Thursday to condemn the Taliban attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar. The Taliban massacre killed more than 140 people, mostly children, at the military-run school in northwestern Pakistan on Tuesday. The nation mourned the heart-wrenching devastation as mass funerals got underway. MOHAMMAD SAJJAD/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Boko Haram blamed for more kidnapping

Nigerian village. Most of those taken were young women, children and members of a civilian defence group

Islamic extremists killed 35 people and kidnapped at least 185 in an attack near the town where nearly 300 schoolgirls were taken hostage in April, witnesses said Thursday.

In Sunday night's attack on the village of Gumburi, most of the kidnapped were young women, children and members of a civilian defence group fighting Boko Haram, according to residents, a security official and a local government officer.

Teenager Aji Ibrahim said he was lucky to escape into the bushes.

"No doubt they were Boko Haram members because they were chanting 'Allahu akbar' (God is great) while shooting at people and torching houses," he said.

News of the attack took days to emerge because the militants have destroyed communications towers and people walked for days to avoid areas under extremist control.

Gumburi is 20 kilometres from Chibok, the northeastern town where extremists kidnapped 276 schoolgirls in April. Dozens of the students escaped that attack, but 219 remain missing.

The militants have kidnapped hundreds of people, but the mass kidnappings of the girls from a boarding school attracted international outrage and condemnation of Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan and his military for their failure to rescue the hostages.

The United States, Britain, France and China were among countries that sent security experts and hostage negotiators to help free the girls.

Washington also flew drones over the area where it believed the schoolgirls were held. None of them have yet been found.

Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau initially demanded the release of his fighters who are being held illegally without charges or trial. But Jonathan said he would not negotiate with terrorists.

There were reports that some of the girls had been married to their captors and some carried across borders.

In a recent video, Shekau said the girls were "an old story," implying their release was no longer up for negotiation. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Soldiers sentenced

A human-rights lawyer says 54 Nigerian soldiers have been sentenced to death because they embarrassed the military by demanding weapons to fight extremists and says they were justified in not going on what would have been a suicide mission.

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Coun. Jeff Waltman photographs the city's official Christmas tree last week in Reading, Pa. Waltman fought to save the 50-foot Norway spruce that many compared to the spindly tree in A Charlie Brown Christmas. The city is now embracing the theme. MICHAEL RUBINKAM/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

'Ugly' Christmas tree gets Peanuts treatment

Norway spruce. Once rejected and shamed, tree becomes symbol of Christmas' imperfection

The official Christmas tree of Reading, Pa., has brought the city plenty of grief. Good grief.

When the 50-foot Norway spruce went up last month, it drew immediate comparisons to the scraggly sapling in A Charlie Brown Christmas. Its giant bare spots and asymmetrical branches were no one's idea of Christmas tree perfection — especially in Pennsylvania, one of the largest producers of Christmas trees in the United States.

Some residents and officials called it an embarrassment and demanded it be replaced. Instead, Reading decided to embrace the Charlie Brown theme.

Workers wrapped a blue blanket around its base — a la Linus — and adorned it with a single red ball. The city announced a worldwide photo and essay contest, with winners to receive copies of the book version of the beloved TV special. And on Saturday, the public is invited to give the tree a makeover, just like the Peanuts gang surprised Charlie Brown by turning his puny pine into a trimmed, twinkling tannenbaum.

"Christmas is so commercialized that we tend to forget what Christmases used to be like," said Mayor Vaughn Spencer, channeling good ol' Charlie Brown himself.

Coun. Jeff Waltman said the conifer symbolizes Reading itself: full of potential and ready for transformation.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Message

"Sometimes we have to keep things in perspective, and I think that's the lesson here."

Reading, Pa., Mayor Vaughn Spencer

Hidden cocaine

Coffee shipment packs extra kick

A Berlin coffee business found stimulants it didn't expect in a shipment of unroasted coffee from Brazil: 33 kilos of cocaine.

Police in the German capital said Thursday that employees at the coffee-roasting business found the bag full of the drug when they opened a newly arrived container of coffee. They then contacted the authorities. The delivery was shipped from Brazil to the German North Sea port of Bremerhaven on its way to Berlin.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Europe. Obesity can be a disability, EU court rules

The European Court of Justice says obesity can be a disability, a ruling that could have consequences for employers across the continent.

The court ruled Thursday in the case of a Danish childminder who says he was unfairly fired for being fat.

The court said if obesity hinders "full and effective participation in professional life," it could count as a disability. Discrimination on the grounds of disability is illegal under European Union law.

Karsten Kaltoft worked as a childminder for 15 years for the Municipality of Billund in Denmark before he was dismissed in 2010.

Kaltoft, who weighed 159 kilograms, says he was fired for being obese, a claim his employer contests.

The court says it was for Danish courts to decide whether Kaltoft's obesity constituted a disability.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Weight

159 kg

Karsten Kaltoft, who weighed 159 kilograms, says he was fired from his job as a childminder for being obese

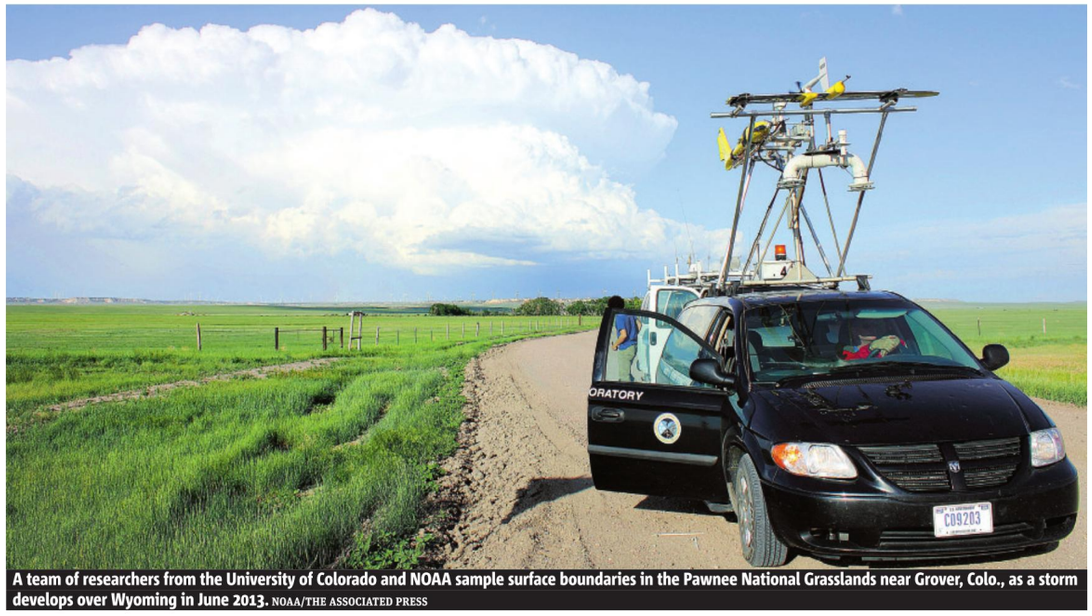
Drones: The new storm chasers

Into the tornado.
Researchers want to expand project that uses drones to penetrate weather systems and collect tornado data

Researchers say they have collected promising weather data by flying instrument-laden drones into big Western and Midwestern storms, and now they want to expand the project in hopes of learning more about how tornadoes form.

Drones can penetrate parts of weather systems that other instruments can't reach, and they can do it at less cost and with less danger than piloted planes, the scientists say.

The University of Colorado and University of Nebraska announced they have formed the Unmanned Aircraft System and Severe Storms Research Group to develop the program.


A team of researchers from the University of Colorado and NOAA sample surface boundaries in the Pawnee National Grasslands near Grover, Colo., as a storm develops over Wyoming in June 2013. NOAA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Why use drones?
Scientists have no other way to get instruments deep inside a storm. Drones can take measurements at any altitude up to about 2,500 feet — higher than measurements by ground stations and storm-chasing vehicles, said Adam Houston of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, who is co-director of the research group. Drones can cover more territory than a ground-based storm chaser, and they don't need an airport to take off or land. A drone can fly into the strong winds, downdrafts, rain and hail of a powerful storm without putting a human pilot in danger.

Don't they crash?
So far, none of the drones have crashed during storm research, but if the scientists launch a more intensive program with more flights, crashes become more likely, said Eric Frew, director of the University of Colorado's Research and Engineering Center for Unmanned Vehicles and a member of the Severe Storms Research Group.

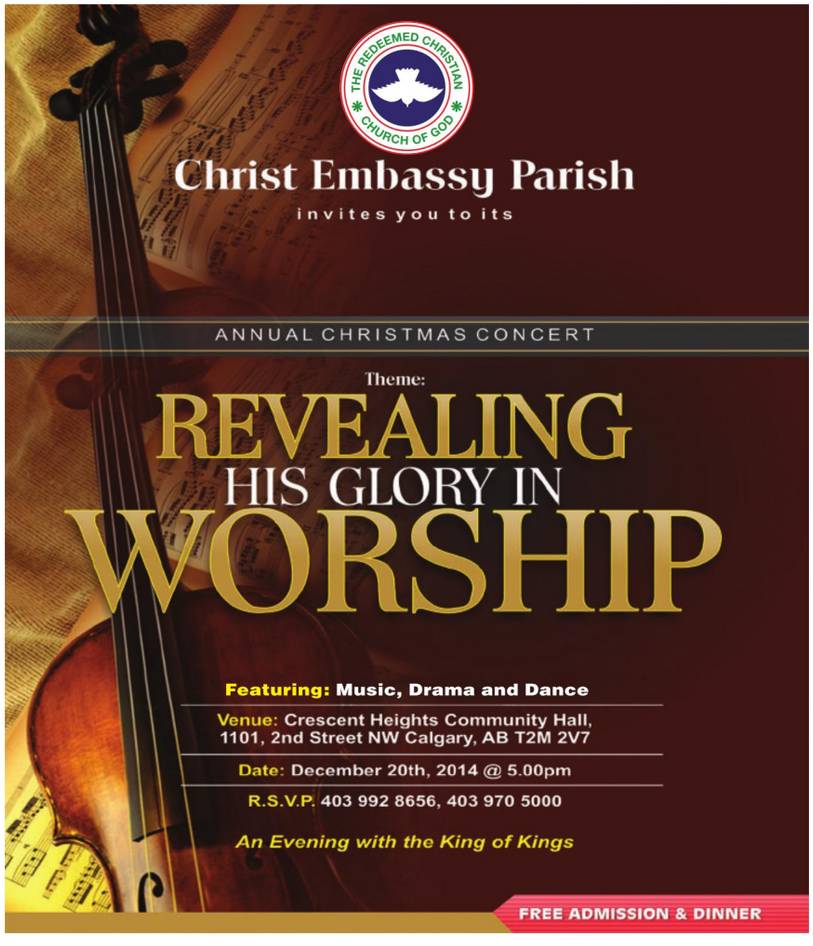
What kind of drones?
The aircraft are about five feet long and have a wingspan of about 10.5 feet. They carry instruments to measure temperature, moisture, wind direction and wind speed, transmitting data to researchers on the ground via Wi-Fi. Including instruments, autopilot and communications gear, they cost $30,000 to $50,000 each. Making them storm-worthy increases the cost above other research drones, but piloted aircraft would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

What do researchers learn?
Researchers try to fly the drones into supercell thunderstorms, which create tornadoes, but not into tornadoes themselves. The measurements taken inside a storm provide a "fingerprint" that can tell where the air inside a storm came from and what forced it there, Houston said. If that air becomes part of a tornado, the fingerprint can help researchers learn how the twister formed. The researchers also want to know if that information could help forecasters predict tornadoes.

What have researchers already done?
Colorado and Nebraska researchers have flown drones into about 10 storms, including six supercell thunderstorms, since 2009. "Funding agencies didn't believe we could do it," Frew said. "We demonstrated that we could do it." The temperature and moisture data from those flights were good, but the wind measurements proved trickier, Houston said, and researchers are working on ways to improve them.

What's next?
The team is looking for a government research grant of $1 to $1.5 million US for a two- or three-year project. They would make multiple trips into storm country during the May-June tornado season and analyze the data.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Evidence in Sony 'whodunit' hacking mostly circumstantial

Response. While many have pointed the finger at North Korea, the U.S. is still investigating

The detective work blaming North Korea for the Sony hacker break-in appears so far to be largely circumstantial, The Associated Press has learned. The dramatic conclusion of a Korean role is based on subtle clues in the hacking tools left behind and the involvement of at least one computer in Bolivia previously traced to other attacks blamed on the North Koreans.

Experts cautioned that hackers notoriously employ disinformation to throw investigators off their tracks, using borrowed tools, tampering with logs and inserting false references to language or nationality.

Workers remove a poster for The Interview from a billboard in Hollywood on Thursday. Sony announced Wednesday it had no choice but to cancel the movie's Christmas release and pull it from theatres due to a credible threat.
MICHAEL THURSTON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The hackers are believed to have been conducting surveillance on the network at Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc. since at least the spring, based on computer forensic evidence and traffic analysis, a person with knowledge of the investigation said.

If the hackers hadn't made their presence known by making demands and destroying files, they probably would still be inside because there was no indication their presence was about to be detected, the person said. This person, who described the evidence as circumstantial, spoke only on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk openly about the case.

Still, the evidence has been considered conclusive enough that a U.S. official has said that federal investigators have now connected the Sony hacking to North Korea.

In public, White House spokesman Josh Earnest on Thursday declined to blame North Korea, saying he didn't want to get ahead of investigations by the Justice Department and the FBI. Earnest said evidence shows the hacking was carried out by a "sophisticated actor" with "malicious intent."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Impact

A breakdown of areas where Sony may suffer damage:

- **Box-office losses.** With a modest budget of about $40 million US, The Interview had been predicted to gross around $30 million in its opening weekend and could have grossed $120 million in U.S. and foreign box-office revenue. Sony has already spent tens of millions on marketing.
- **Stirred or shaken.** A leaked script of Sony's upcoming James Bond film Spectre led to an online frenzy of articles warning readers of "major spoilers." The potential damage from a hit to the blockbuster franchise is big. "How can they proceed if everyone in the audience has already read the script?" said an analyst. "You basically need to start over and see how much you can salvage."

Chain co-founder

Kids can play on field for now: Subway honcho

A co-founder of the Subway sandwich chain says kids in Danbury, Conn., can continue to play soccer on a field he owns until a new athletic field is ready to open.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Franc

Swiss central bank imposes negative interest rates

Switzerland's central bank has imposed negative interest rates on commercial bank deposits, with the aim of preventing the Swiss franc from gaining more strength against other currencies. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Market Minute

DOLLAR
86.23¢
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14,346.75 (+132.87)

OIL
$54.11 US (-$2.36)

GOLD
$1,194.80 US (+$0.30)

Natural gas: $3.66 US (-$0.04)
Dow Jones: 17,778.15 (+421.28)

Online prices fluctuate wildly minute-by-minute

Online shopping has become as volatile as stock market trading.

Wild, minute-by-minute price swings on everything from clothes to TVs have made it difficult for holiday shoppers to "buy low."

A growing number of retailers are using software that changes online prices based on demand, competition, inventory and other factors. The main goal is to undercut rivals when necessary, and raise prices when demand is high and there's no competitive pressure.

But the new online tools can change the price on a single item — say, a sweater — dozens of times throughout the day. And that can leave shoppers confused about when they can get the best deal.

High/low

$269.95

On a recent Monday, the price of Beats Studio headphones fluctuated between $269.95 and $199.95 US with four price drops and five price increases on Amazon.com

Take Aishia Senior, who recently watched the price on a coat she wanted rise and fall several times between $110 and $139 US in a span of six hours on Amazon.com. She was so frustrated by the price fluctuations that she ended up not buying the coat on the site at all.

The rapidly changing prices come as retailers struggle to achieve conflicting goals this holiday season.

They want to appease shoppers hungry for deals with the ever-lower prices they've come to expect since the recession. But they also want to protect their bottom line, which is difficult to do because lower prices cut into profits.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

One-hour delivery

Amazon.com launched a service Thursday known as Prime Now that promises one-hour delivery of household products to its Prime customers in Manhattan. One-hour delivery costs $7.99 US, but two-hour delivery is also offered for free.

- Retailers used to check prices of their rivals' websites and then manually change the prices online. But that was a tedious task and many stores made price changes only once day.
- The idea of minute-by-minute monitoring of online prices started with Amazon.com, which for years has used its own software to do so.

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VOICES

CUBA WAS OUR PLACE

THE KOHLER REPORT
By Rebecca Kohler

I don't know too much about Cuba or why the U.S. ended diplomatic relations with them in 1961.

I grew up hearing about an "embargo," a missile crisis and something about some pigs on the bay. Delicious? Oh yeah, and that communism thing.

In my adulthood I came to know Cuba as a sunny vacation destination for friends who enjoyed bad food and copious amounts of rum.

The fact that Cuba had poor relations with the States made it seem cooler — like that weird loner in high school who stayed away from the popular crowd but was still hot.

But with the announcement Wednesday that the U.S. will be opening an embassy in Havana, it's only a matter of time before U.S. tourist visas are approved and the American masses start flooding in.

A happy day for Cuban business people, a sad one for Canadian travellers; Cuba was our place.

If Americans wanted to travel to Cuba, they had to fly through Canada to get there. It was this one thing we had that they needed, aside from poutine: Airports.

Now Cuba's going to be flooded with our loud, southern counterparts.

Large derrieres and fanny packs knocking us to the ground as we, in true Canadian fashion, apologize for being in their way.

As we sit at tables by the ocean, enjoying the familiar scent of universal health care, we'll be startled by the woman at the next table, speaking to the waiter like she has a megaphone implanted in her mouth, "EXCUSE ME. I'll have another mojito! GRACIAS!"

Gone are the days when the only American we saw in Cuba was Ernest Hemingway's ghost as he smoked a Monte Cristo with that man by the sea.

A farewell to arm-room

Gone are the days when the only American we saw in Cuba was Ernest Hemingway's ghost as he smoked a Monte Cristo with that man by the sea.

And what about the old cars? Studebakers, Oldsmobiles, Soviet imports? I don't really care about cars, but I do care about ambience.

Those cars gave a fun trip an educational twist — sure, you were puking up Havana Club, but you were doing it in an automobile museum.

Annoying people and Ford Focuses aside, maybe the saddest part about this important diplomatic shift is how much this is going to cost us.

I have friends who have spent an all-inclusive week in Cuba for under $1,000.

I doubt prices will stay so low, with 300 million potential new customers trampling through the discount-getaway websites.

Supply and demand is a harsh economic bitch. Cuban resort owners are probably dusting out their wallets right now as they learn to prepare a plate of grits.

Look, maybe there's a bright side.

Those new cars? A boon for the environment. Trade relations with the States? The food is bound to improve. Americans at the table beside you? A reason to feel better about yourself.

Let's look at this as two countries hugging after a long, ridiculous disagreement. It's kinda beautiful.

That said, I wonder what North Korea's like this time of the year.

Rebecca Kohler is a standup comic, writer, actor, gymnast, lawyer and chemist. (Some of this isn't true.) Follow her on Twitter at @becca_kohler

Happy face/Sad face

From kowtowing to hackers to old-school illness, Metro weighs-in on the news that made headlines this week:

AND BY 'YES', WE MEAN 'NO'

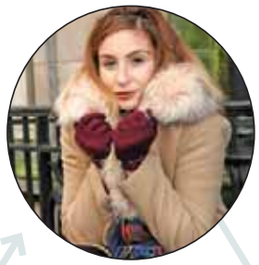
Major bummer for nearly 300 would-be Johns Hopkins students. Turns out the prestigious university in Baltimore accidentally sent congratulatory admissions messages to 294 applicants who had actually been turned down. A contracted employee had pulled the wrong list of emails and set in motion the unfortunate turn of events.

THE MAGIC OF INCLUSIVITY

J.K. Rowling has no doubt made kids from The Youth Project in Halifax seriously happy after retweeting a poster they made that says, "If Harry Potter taught us anything, it's that no one should live in a closet." The tweet was in response to a fan asking if LGBT students were in attendance at Hogwarts. We think it's pretty safe to say that the answer is "yes".

HOLLYWOOD VS. THE HACKERS (SPOILER: THE HACKERS WIN)

Sony Pictures cancelled Seth Rogan/James Franco movie The Interview, about two guys who plot to kill North Korea's leader, after hackers break into their system and make 9/11-style terror threats. If we don't have the freedom to watch third-rate political spoofs on Christmas Day, have the terrorists already won?



ART SCHOOL GOES HEART SCHOOL

A U.K. art student raised more than £21,000 for a homeless man after he offered her his last £3 so she could get home safely. Dominique Harrison-Bentzen set up a donation page asking for £3 a pop to give to a homeless man named Robbie. In exchange, she and others spent 24 hours out on the streets. Makes that nude performance piece challenging the hegemony or whatever seem pretty lame in comparison, huh?

THE MUMPS

Millions of non-medical professionals diagnosed Nova Scotia native Sidney Crosby with mumps days before the Pittsburgh Penguins' official doctors admitted the star player had the illness. More than a dozen players from five teams have been sidelined with the illness that causes, among other things, unmistakably swollen glands.

metro

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The must-see films of 2014

Look-back list. This year in film was one that offered accidental echoes of real life from charged movies about race like Dear White People and Selma, to anxieties about the passing of time, reflected in Boyhood

MATT PRIGGE
Metro World News in New York

The Grand Budapest Hotel placed second on our list of top films of 2014. CONTRIBUTED

Here then are the best, darkest, funniest and, occasionally, just fun movies of the year.

10. Edge of Tomorrow
The first two-thirds of this Tom Cruise sci-fi spectacular are so good — hey, it's Groundhog Day with aliens, how do you screw that up? — that the so-so third that follows is easy to excuse. More funny/clever than rip-roaring, this — not interchangeable, interlocking Marvel romps — is what should be clogging multiplexes.

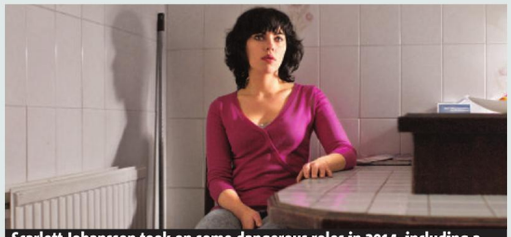
9. Selma
The world's first studio picture about Martin Luther King Jr. could have been another turgid biopic. Instead, it's a thrilling telling of a small but vital chapter in his life. And its portrayal of protests is more than accidentally topical, as peaceful protests concerning race rage in the streets: It's about the grunt work of activism and the way it requires sly manipulation.

8. Two Days, One Night
It's easy to take for granted Belgium's Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne (Kid with a Bike), who reliably churn out deeply humanist and deeply gripping social dramas that often play like nail-biting thrillers. Their latest is only slightly better than usual, which is to say it's consistently heartbreaking, with Marion Cotillard rushing like mad on a fool's errand to save her crappy job.

7. Inherent Vice
The year's funniest comedy is, of course, an adaptation of the unadaptable Thomas Pynchon. The daunting novelist's impenetrable stoner detective tome becomes more than just another Big Lebowski: Combining Pynchon with Paul Thomas Anderson, it has the weirdest sense of humour since ... well, Anderson's Punch-Drunk Love.

6. Dear White People
Important without being pompous, necessary but still a blast, Justin Simien's temperature-taking of modern times as reflected through campus life wasn't really about stupid white people so much as about the diversity of black life that never, ever gets shown on screens.

1. Under the Skin


Scarlett Johansson took on some dangerous roles in 2014, including a mysterious alien in Under the Skin. CONTRIBUTED

Scarlett Johansson was dangerous in 2014. Lucy turned her into the invincible master of the universe. She was merely an alien seductress in this hypnotic mood piece, in which she trolled Glasgow, luring bros to a mysterious, inexplicable kind of death. There's a lot going on here, from its unflattering, detached view of humanity to its playfully empathic view of a psychopath who tries, and fails, to become human. But it's also a study of ScarJo, celebrity icon: someone outside of the rest of us, lusted after yet unobtainable, who ultimately can never be one of us, even if that may be for the best.

5. We are the Best!
Amidst all the misery and tragedy of this year, there was always this: a 100 per cent joyous comedy about self-serious Swedish tween punk rock girls. They banged away at songs about sports and corporations with less finesse than Animal the Muppet.

4. Listen Up Philip
There were a lot of sociopath movies this year, from Whiplash to Big Eyes. Jason Schwartzman's young, cartoonishly pompous novelist wasn't even the worst of them, but he was the saddest — an upstart trying to be the kind of literary jerk of a bygone era and succeeding only at turning into a sour loner who drives away the only girl, potentially, who could put up with him (Elisabeth Moss). The film's final line of narration may make you dive for a stiff drink.

3. National Gallery
Frederick Wiseman has been cranking out observational documentaries on institutions — High School, Hospital, Central Park — for half a century. This hang at the London museum is more of the same, only more brilliant than usual — a shape-shifter that over its three leisurely hours turns into a look at cosmic insignificance, with art living longer than those who exhibit and protect it.

2. The Grand Budapest Hotel
There's always a deep, dark melancholy bubbling under Wes Anderson films. Here, it's harder to find than usual; this is his zippiest hunk of confectionery yet. But it's also set in a Europe about to be wasted by the Second World War, where violence that seems cartoonish — severed fingers, Looney Tunes-style plummets off cliffs — soon step up and then some. It's so hilarious that its chasmic despair isn't noticeable till a second viewing.

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Mackenzie Mauzy plays Rapunzel and Billy Magnussen is the prince in Into the Woods. CONTRIBUTED

Meryl's men in tights and 30 feet of hair

Into the Woods. Big-screen adaptation of Broadway musical posed many challenges for the actors playing Rapunzel and her prince

RICHARD CROUSE
scene@metronews.ca

I learned a great deal during my interview with Mackenzie Mauzy and Billy Magnussen. The Manhattan-based performers brought me up to speed on the rite of passage for all New York actors, Rapunzel's hair and whether or not Meryl Streep likes men in blue tights.

The pair play Rapunzel and Rapunzel's Prince in the big-screen adaptation of the legendary Broadway musical Into the Woods.

The two relative newcomers — she's best known as Abigail on Forever while he made a memorable appearance on Boardwalk Empire and will soon be seen in an upcoming Steven Spielberg spy thriller — help bring fairy tales to life as part of a large ensemble that includes Johnny Depp, Emily Blunt and Meryl Streep.

Which leads me to the first thing I learned during our chat.

"Meryl's a beast," says Magnussen. "She's the one who got me the job. I was in a play and she saw it and recommended me to (director) Rob (Marshall) and (producer) Mark Platt. The play was Vonya and Sonia and Marsha and Spike, and I dress up as a prince because we're going to a costume party. It's all about the blue tights."

"Meryl likes the blue tights," laughs Mauzy.

Next, I discovered the wig Mauzy wears in the film put her at a follicular risk.

"They used my hair and braided it into the extensions," she says. "It was 30 feet long, so I wrapped it around my arm. I had a little fake one for rehearsal but I asked to actually wear (the real hair) one day so I could figure out how to be mobile. It's a tripping hazard! We joke about how I had a really strong left bicep for a couple of months."

Then, Magnussen enlightened me on a rite of passage for New York actors: "Once you get on Law and Order, you're really an actor."

Both have done time in the L&O trenches.

Mauzy played a child killer named Carly Di Gravia. "It's weird I remember that name," she says.

"It was one of my first jobs," Magnussen says.

"They bleached my hair white and I was a Southern male prostitute. How do you tell your mom? Hey watch this!"

Just call him Steve

Apparently it's OK to call Stephen Sondheim — the legendary composer and eight-time Tony Award winner — Steve. "Everyone calls him Steve!" laughs Mackenzie Mauzy, who worked with him on the big-screen version of Into the Woods. "He likes to be called Steve! It is weird. Steve Sondheim."

Shakespeare classics anywhere, anytime

Digital. Productions recorded live at the historic Globe Theatre can be downloaded to your computer or smartphone

STEVE GOW
scene@metronews.ca

If you thought movie downloading in the virtual age might pose a threat to the future of Shakespeare's historic Globe Theatre, you'd be wrong.

"People appreciate a live experience all the more," insists Domenic Dromgoole, art director at London's iconic theatre. "So our audiences are very steady and very regular, largely because they love that feeling of aliveness."

In fact, the works of the Elizabethan-era playwright have been so popular, the theatre has partnered with Landmark Cinemas in Canada to premiere Globe On-Screen — a series of live productions filmed from The Bard's iconic stage.

Although the experience may not be as authentic as sitting on the hard wooden pews, the cinematic replication has its rewards.

"We try our best to recreate the feeling of being in the theatre," explained Dromgoole.

"You hear the audience laughing, you see the audience within the frame and I think the fact we're recording an event rather than trying to make a film gives it a freshness."

The Globe has also created its own video-on-demand service to bring Shakespeare classics to the masses through the Internet or smartphones. Go to shakespearesglobe.com and click on Globe Player, where you can rent the video for $7.25 or buy it for $14.50.

"We like spreading our work as far and wide as possible," said Dromgoole. "I find it thrilling that you can be up a mountain in the Himalayas and, if you had a mobile, you could download and watch Hamlet — I find that delightful in a bizarre way."

The Globe on-screen series continues until April, with a new play screening each month in Canadian theatres and available on-demand.

From the upcoming productions of The Taming of the Shrew (Dec. 20) or The Tempest (Jan. 10), Dromgoole insists they're all equally as thrilling.

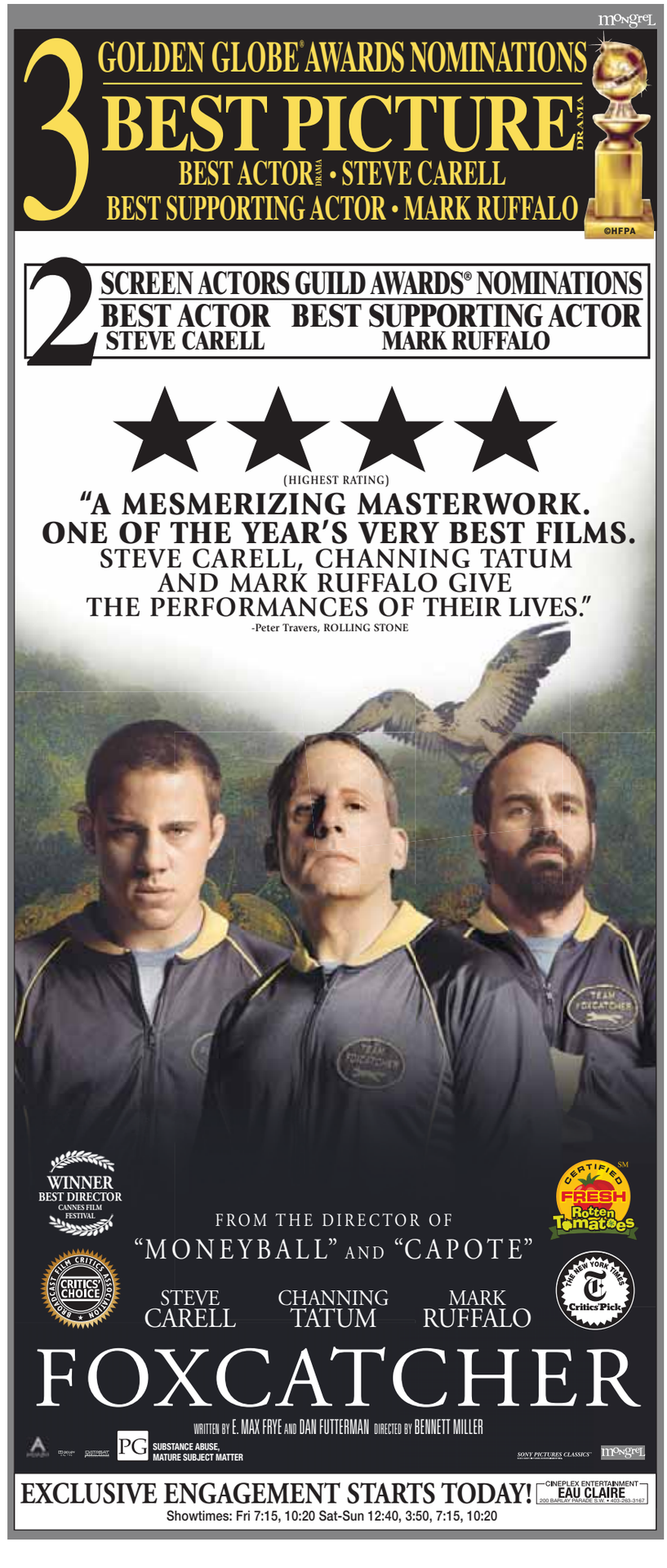
"The great thing about Shakespeare is that you celebrate difference rather than good, better or best," he said. "They're great plays but they're all distinct and delightful for different reasons."

The Globe's production of Taming of the Shrew will be available Dec. 20. CONTRIBUTED

Playtime

The Bard is coming! Here are some highlights of the Globe's onscreen productions.

- **The Taming of the Shrew.** A romantic comedy about a fortune-seeker's taming of his headstrong mistress.
- **A Midsummer Night's Dream.** Three plots interconnect in this soap opera-like love farce that's set largely in a forest inhabited by fairies.
- **The Tempest.** The tale of a sorcerer who conjures up a storm to lure his traitorous brother to the island where he's exiled.
- **Macbeth.** The tragic classic follows a soldier wracked by guilt and paranoia after murdering the king to obtain the throne of Scotland.
- **In theatres.** For a listing of dates and theatres, go to meigroup.ca/shakespeare.



Black List. Tale of Russian royal tops best unproduced script list

Hollywood industry insiders have compiled this year's rundown of the best-liked unproduced scripts, with a treatment of Russian regal epic Catherine the Great topping the list.

The annual Black List can count among its alumni a number of screenplays that went on to enjoy an incredible critical or commercial reception, including American Hustle, Foxcatcher, The Social Network, Juno, Slumdog Millionaire, The King's Speech, The Hangover and The Imitation Game.

Coming from a relative unknown, Kristina Lauren Anderson, whose sole previous credit is as a producer on 2011 indie film Girlfriend, Catherine the Great profiles Sophia Augusta Fredericka, a relatively poor princess who ruled over Russia for 34 years following the death of her husband and became known as the country's greatest regent.

Entrants to this year's Black List were required to garner at least six mentions from submissions made by the 250-plus film executives, agents and other insiders, and Catherine the Great outstripped its peers with 51 recommendations.

"It's the story of a young girl who takes control of her life, and her marriage, and her kingdom, to become Russia's most beloved monarch," said The Hunger Games and Captain Phillips screenwriter Billy Ray, who introduced Anderson's script via a YouTube video.

The full Black List for 2014 and previous years can be found at blcklst.com/lists. AFP

Now in theatres

Ratings and synopses courtesy of Rotten Tomatoes. For more movie reviews, trailers and news go to RottenTomatoes.com.

Ratings: *Certified Fresh:* *Fresh:* *Rotten:* *Audience response:* *Audience anticipation for the film:* +

Musical

Annie

Director. Will Gluck

Stars. Jamie Foxx, Quvenzhane Wallis

A Broadway classic that has delighted audiences for generations comes to the big screen with a new, contemporary vision. This modern telling captures the magic of the classic characters. Annie, a young, happy foster kid who's also tough enough to make her way on the streets of New York in 2014. Originally left by her parents as a baby with the promise that they'd be back for her someday, it's been a hard-knock life ever since.

Rotten Tomatoes™ score
Critics: 19% **Audience:** + 86%

Drama

Wild

Director. Jean-Marc Vallée

Stars. Reese Witherspoon, Kevin Rankin

With the dissolution of her marriage and the death of her mother, Cheryl Strayed has lost all hope. After years of reckless, destructive behaviour, she makes a rash decision. With absolutely no experience, driven only by sheer determination, Cheryl hikes more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail, alone. Wild powerfully captures the terrors and pleasures of one young woman forging ahead against all odds.

Rotten Tomatoes™ score
Critics: 88% **Audience:** + 95%

Action/Comedy

Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb

Director. Shawn Levy

Stars. Ben Stiller, Robin Williams

Get ready for the wildest and most adventure-filled Night At the Museum ever as Larry (Ben Stiller) spans the globe, uniting favourite and new characters while embarking on an epic quest to save the magic before it is gone forever.

Rotten Tomatoes™ score
Critics: 53% **Audience:** + 97%

Mystery/Drama

The Gambler

Director. Rupert Wyatt

Stars. Mark Wahlberg

Jim Bennett (Mark Wahlberg) is a risk taker. Both an English professor and a high-stakes gambler, Bennett bets it all when he borrows from a gangster (Michael Kenneth Williams) and offers his own life as collateral. Always one step ahead, Bennett pits his creditor against the operator of a gambling ring (Alvin Ing) and leaves his dysfunctional relationship with his wealthy mother.

Rotten Tomatoes™ score
Critics: 62% **Audience:** + 94%

Taking a gritty '70s film and making it your own

Writer interview. Man behind The Departed tries his hand at remaking a 1974 James Caan drama with Mark Wahlberg

MATT PRIGGE
Metro World News in New York

William Monahan was an acclaimed writer who became an acclaimed novelist who became an Oscar-winning screenwriter who now also directs. He won for The Departed, and that script's brash, pissy, sarcastic tone is all over his script for The Gambler, a very loose take on the 1974 drama, about an addict (there, James Caan; here, Mark Wahlberg) out for self-destruction. Monahan has already reunited with Wahlberg for his second directed work, Mojave, out next year.

What's your relationship with the original?
I've never seen it. It came out when I was 13 or something, and it seemed to be about sports gambling, which was not then, or now, my cup of tea. I only work from text if I adapt something. So when I was commissioned to write it, I was given (James) Toback's script, and I worked from that. I don't even know if it was a shooter or not. Once I took the job I wouldn't watch the original film. If it's good, I don't want to see it. I'd prefer to work off a script, even an incomplete script — which is what I did with the other adaptation I did.

There are many reasons to not simply repeat the original. What is yours?
I'm hired to do my own thing, not just do another iteration of the original film. One of the truths of writing is that there are only a certain number of stories. It's always the teller, not the tale. So my job is to be as ignorant of the original material as I can be and, for better or worse, infuse it with myself.

The Gambler, starring Mark Wahlberg, opens this Friday. CONTRIBUTED

The end is very, very different here.
I don't even know what the end was in the original.

(Spoiler alert) He goes to a whorehouse and gets slashed in the face.
Something like that, yeah. Very '70s, right? I always love the gutter '70s realism, because it's never really real, and it's always done by middle-class people. Basically, it's bulls—. College professor gets slashed in the face in a whorehouse — no wonder I blanked out on the script at that point. The thing about '70s realism is it gets too much, too much press. What happened was the scripts got sloppier, there was more improv and the camera moves were nowhere like they were in Doris Day pictures. Apart from that there was a little more lens flare, a little more Technicolor hijinks. But crock of s—, really.

As the '70s go, the only things that appeal to me are the more formal pictures, like Apocalypse Now or the Godfather films. It's like I love Cassavetes for what he did. But I know what he did, which is he and a bunch of his friends sprang a 16mm camera around an apartment while up crappy dialogue. I just don't see where it's much different from Yoko Ono having a fly walk across someone's face. I prefer motion pictures to be a little more put together than that.

Who are your influences then?
I couldn't begin to tell you. Watching films is like a songwriter listening to the radio. It's like, "Oh that bit works, that bit doesn't." Three quarters of everything doesn't work. And what you want to concentrate on is what does work. Sometimes it can only be one tiny moment in a film, one shot, one line. There's no real consistency in influence.

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Deaths in film can be traumatizing for kids

Study. Researchers have found murders more common in children's films than adult dramas

By the numbers

- **2.5 times.** More likely that there will be the death of a significant character in a children's animated film compared to an adult drama.
- **2.8 times.** More likely to be murder in children's films, and the victims are five times more likely to be parents.

Nemo's mother is eaten by a barracuda; Tarzan's parents fall prey to a leopard; and don't forget Bambi's mother — she was gunned down by a hunter. Children's animated films are rife with murder and mayhem.

While such movie videos make popular gifts at Christmas and Hanukkah, parents may want to take precautions when young children first watch these films, which researchers say could traumatize little ones unprepared for characters dying — often in horrible ways. Their study, entitled Cartoons Kill, is published in the Christmas issue of the British Medical Journal, the journal's annual edition that's typically dedicated to tongue-in-cheek medical research and other lighthearted offerings.

And while this study may be about animated films, its message is deadly serious.

"I think a lot of people have talked about this, the fact that there seems to be a lot of deaths in children's films," said Ian Colman, a mental health epidemiologist at the University of Ottawa. "And we thought, let's have a look at this, and it seems to be timely."

Colman and co-principal investigator James Kirkbride of University College London in the U.K. used standard epidemiological techniques to analyze how soon into an animated kids' film a significant character meets their end.

The record for quickest death of significant character in a kids' film is held by Finding Nemo. Nemo's mother is gobbled by an undersea predator in the first four minutes of the film. CONTRIBUTED

The record is held by 2003's Finding Nemo, in which the main character's mother — and dozens of his gestating clown fish siblings — are gobbled up by the voracious undersea predator four minutes into the film.

"I've got two young kids myself, and I started watching these films, and my kids have been quite honestly traumatized by a few of them," Colman said of his four-year-old son and six-year-old daughter.

"We tried watching The Land Before Time, which seems pretty innocent. You've got these cute little cartoon dinosaurs, but the mother of the main character gets savagely attacked and killed by a Tyrannosaurus rex in the first five minutes of the film. And at that point my daughter (about age four at the time) was just completely hysterical and begging me to stop the film. And when we saw something similar in Finding Nemo, we really started to think maybe there's something going on here."

The team viewed 45 of the top-grossing animated children's films and 90 dramatic movies aimed at adults — 135 in all — to determine in which genres the risk was greatest for a main character or a significant family member or friend to die. The animated movies made for kids won hands-down.

"I know some of these films have been quite traumatic for my kids and they've led to a lot of questions. Many of these films, as soon as they end, the kids start asking, 'Why this?' and 'Why that?'

"This can actually be a good thing because it can give us a chance to talk about some important concepts, like death. But it can also make for some really difficult conversations that kids may not be ready for, and this is particularly important for younger kids," Colman said. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Sequel. Tim Burton penning Beetlejuice 2

Michael Keaton is expected to reprise his role as Beetlejuice in the sequel. CONTRIBUTED

In discussion over the past few years, the followup to Beetlejuice, that macabre 1988 comedy, is finally taking shape. Director Tim Burton is now working on a script for the sequel, in which Michael Keaton is expected to reprise his role as the wacky ghost.

The arrival of Beetlejuice 2 is "closer than ever," according to Tim Burton. In an interview promoting his latest film Big Eyes, the director told Comingsoon.net he was currently writing the screenplay with help from Seth Grahame-Smith. The two previously collaborated to pen Dark Shadows.

But there is more good news for Beetlejuice fans: Michael Keaton will star in this long-awaited sequel. Nearly 25 years after the release of the first movie, the actor will again don the costume of the vulgar and somewhat unreliable spirit who attempts to help a couple of fellow ghosts to rid their home of its pesky living occupants.

Plans for a second Beetlejuice movie were mentioned as early as 1990, but were shelved as Burton was already busy with Batman Returns. It was only in 2011 that the project was resurrected with Grahame-Smith's help on the script. AFP

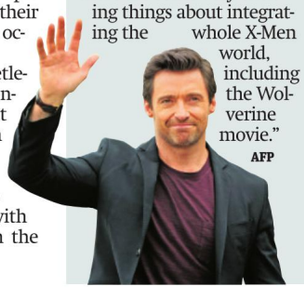
Upcoming

Jackman in talks for X-Men role

Hugh Jackman could join X-Men Apocalypse, the third film in the prequel trilogy.

If Jackman signs up for the film, it will be his seventh time — or eighth when counting his very brief appearance in X-Men: First Class — portraying the immortal mutant Wolverine. The actor took part in the original trilogy (released between 2000 and 2006), in two spinoffs on his character (X-Men Origins: Wolverine in 2009 and The Wolverine in 2013) and in the second film in the prequel trilogy X-Men: Days of Future Past (2014).

"I have been speaking with the guys and I am not at liberty to tell exactly what's going on," Jackman said. "What I do know is there are some very exciting things about integrating the whole X-Men world, including the Wolverine movie." AFP



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Q&A. Paul Thomas Anderson has been fan of Pynchon books for years

Joaquin Phoenix and Paul Thomas Anderson CONTRIBUTED

For filmmaker Paul Thomas Anderson's latest trick, he's taken on a literary titan long thought impossible to adapt for film — or for a single film, at least. But Anderson had been such a fan of Thomas Pynchon for so long that he says he couldn't not do the film version of Inherent Vice, Pynchon's 2009 novel ostensibly about a stoner private detective (Joaquin Phoenix) working a case in 1970 Los Angeles. And since he's presumably spent some time with the notoriously reclusive author, we asked Anderson to draw us a picture of Pynchon. The results are pretty entertaining.

Adapting Pynchon for the screen is a daunting task. At what point did you first think, "I should do this"?
It was two things at once. It was, "I don't know how to do this and I can't do this, but no one else is going to be allowed to do this but me."

I love, and have loved his work for a long time. I flirted with trying to do Vineland, I certainly thought for a second Mason and Dixon could be done — and maybe someday still will. But this presented itself as doable, as a great lead character weaving through many other great characters.

And I loved how many girls there were in it, too. There's so many great parts for girls, and getting your hero to interact with all of them — and most of them are half-clothed. That just seemed so appealing.

If you take your films chronologically, it tells an interesting story of the development of the L.A. area.
Sure, sure, for sure. But really not by design. That's just kind of the way things have fallen.

There are people who buy books about history and people who don't. I'm one of those people who buys books about neighbourhoods, where you can see, "Here's the picture of it in 1920 and here's the picture of it today."

Do you think of your films that way, as a body of work with overarching themes?
Only in interviews, I do. Like now. But it's funny, things come out in the wash. Like on The Master, the preoccupation was, "You make films about fathers and sons." And I was like, "I do? F—, I guess I do. OK, sure."

I never thought I'd be making a detective movie, ever. This was a way to make a Thomas Pynchon movie, and his concerns are my concerns.

I'd like to steal from his kind of preoccupation with this country, this world, where it's at, where it's going. Republicans in power, land grabs, abuses of power. You know, all this kind of stuff that I love. NED EHRBAR

Joaquin's dopey detective best viewed with a clear head

Inherent Vice. Oscar-winning actor says it would be redundant to get stoned before watching his Doc Sportello character

NED EHRBAR
Metro World News in Hollywood

Inherent Vice marks the second time Oscar winner Joaquin Phoenix has teamed up with director Paul Thomas Anderson — they previously collaborated on 2013's The Master — and this one couldn't be more different. For one thing, it's an adaptation of a novel by notoriously elusive and verbose author Thomas Pynchon. For another, it features a twisty, hazy detective novel plot centred around Phoenix's stoner detective, Doc Sportello. But that doesn't mean Phoenix thinks you should smoke up yourself before watching.

Are you worried about people finding the plot hard to follow? Do you have advice about how to watch it?
I would say that it's a movie to be experienced. I think if you're sitting there and trying to figure it out, you're going to miss a lot of the beauty of the film.

It really is something where the texture of the movie, the tone of it is such a wonderful experience, it's just this haze. I remember when I was done watching it, I didn't realize how much I'd been transported into this other world, because Paul just lulls you into this state. It's so subtle how he brings you into it.

So I think the best experience is to just go along for the ride and not try to figure it all out. The cool thing about movies is everybody has a different way of watching them and experiencing them.

Joaquin Phoenix CONTRIBUTED

Sober thoughts

Joaquin Phoenix says there is no need to get stoned before seeing Inherent Vice.

"I don't think so. Because I feel like the movie gives you that feeling, do you know what I mean? So I wouldn't suggest it."

So, I have to ask: Yes or no — Is Pynchon in the film?
I really don't know. It's funny because I feel like kind of a d— now, but I never asked. Like, I just assumed that he wasn't around.

My publicist showed me something where Josh (Brolin) had said that he was around or that he showed up, and I was like, "How did Josh know?" I felt a little bit left out, like did Paul tell Josh and didn't tell me? But, no, I never asked. It just never occurred to me that he would be.

How does it differ when you have something as dense as this novel versus a script?
It's weird because there's times when it's really helpful and then there's times when it's really frustrating, because there's things that you loved so much in the book you want to get into the film but you just can't. There's a lot of characters that were just left out.

But obviously the more information you have, the better. It's just tough for me. It was a bit of a struggle because I wanted to remain confused and naive about the story, which isn't difficult to do. You'd have to read it a hundred times, like Paul did, to really get your head around it.

But I always wanted to remain in that state, and it's something that Paul really stirred up. He would combine certain characters or take dialogue from one character and apply it to another, just stir everything up and create this sense of confusion where I didn't really know what was what.

Is there a difference in the dynamic with him since working on The Master?
Everything is different. The whole tone of this was different. This felt much more open in a way. When we worked on The Master, it felt so intimate.

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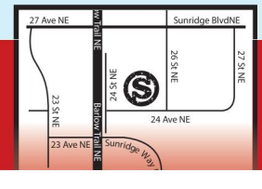

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To portray a painter, you must learn to paint

Mr. Turner Q&A. Timothy Spall is proud of the artistic skills he developed while preparing to play famed British painter J.M.W. Turner

NED EHRBAR
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You don't get very far into a conversation with British character actor Timothy Spall without him slipping off on an eyebrow-raising tangent. For instance, we're sitting in a room at the InterContinental Hotel, a name that brings to mind an anecdote.

"InterContinental ... I worked in one once. It was the worst place — in the kitchen, in the pastry room," Spall recalls. "I spent all day washing pastry tins in boiling hot water without any soap. My hands — it was like I was wearing rubber gloves, they were so fat and pink. And the chef said, 'Oh by the way, there's some rubber gloves over there.' 'You F–tard!'" He lets out a hearty laugh before adding, "I didn't go back. I joined the theatre."

Another random personal detail he slips in later is that he owns — and extensively uses — an interesting boat.

"It's a bit of a funny old boat. It's a flat-bottom, seagoing barge. And I've been going on the North Sea in it a few times," he says. "I did this mad thing in this boat. We left the Thames, and I was going to go to France and go through the canals. But my wife and I said, 'No, bullocks, let's discover our own country.' So I turned right and we circumnavigated the entire British Isles. On and off, it took four years because I had to go off and make the money to pay for the mooring and the fuel."

Speaking of money, aside from being a former dishwasher and amateur explorer, Spall is first and foremost an actor. And his latest work involves embodying the complicated life of famed British painter J.M.W. Turner in Mike Leigh's Mr. Turner, something he ended up doing much more preparation for than he was expecting.

Timothy Spall plays J.M.W. Turner in Mr. Turner. CONTRIBUTED

"We'd first talked about it seven years ago. Then, in 2010, Mike had me into his office and told me his next film would be about Turner and asked if I was still up for it. I said, 'Yeah, yeah, of course I am!' He said, 'And also, if you don't mind, I'd like you to start learning how to paint now,'" Spall remembers.

That led to some very extensive fine art lessons.

"There's about 300 different images that we made and about 24 paintings. I eventually ended up doing a full-scale copy of Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth. I don't quite believe it. I've got it on my wall, I look at it and go, 'I didn't do that.' I even had it framed in the same kind of frame that's in the National Gallery. You know, it's not Turner, but it is great."

Sound effects

Timothy Spall knows a lot of attention is being paid to the guttural noises he makes in his portrayal of J.M.W. Turner, but he swears they're not just for comic or actorly effect. "He's this kind of simian, almost earth-like character — like he could come out the mud of the Thames — but he's got all this amazing polymathic intellect, this poetic soul. We elected to make him very introspective," Spall explains. "We made him a man that could've said a million things, but all he did was he computed them and imploded them back into himself in these noises."

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Metro's here for some yuletide cheer! We offer up the best holiday movies you can stream to help get you into the Christmas spirit.

MARIA BARBERA
Metro World News in New York

5 Movies to watch for the holidays

National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation

This is a classic Christmas comedy if there ever was one. As Chevy Chase prepares to have his extended family over for the holidays, a variety of (hilarious) disasters ensue. This film is filled with a ton of classic gags. If you're feeling nostalgic for a time when physical, family-oriented comedy thrived, be sure to check this out!

Scrooged

Bill Murray is probably the last person most people would associate with Ebenezer Scrooge. And that's why this movie works so well. A modern, comedic take on the famous holiday tale A Christmas Carol, this movie features a Scrooge we can care about, sympathize with, and even laugh with. Check it out!

A Charlie Brown Christmas

Let's just face it: When the holidays come around, you can't really ever go wrong with Charlie Brown. Whether you're looking for something for the whole family, revisiting your childhood, or adamantly insisting that "Charlie Brown is totally for adults, too!" (hey, more power to you, man), this is a great option!

12 Dates of Christmas

The holidays are the time to indulge: on copious amounts of food; on gift splurges for your loved ones (or, hey, even yourself, no judgement); and on cheesy rom-coms that you dutifully roll your eyes at during the rest of the year. Take in the spirit of the season and check out this adorable romantic comedy, which tells the story of an unfortunate girl who is forced to go on the same horrible date 12 times.

Christmas in Paradise

After a tough year, two different families embark on a cruise to San Juan for Christmas, hoping to escape their troubles and enjoy the holiday. Their paths entwine during the vacation, and the members of each family become instrumental in each other's journeys. If you're in the mood for a sentimental, uplifting Christmas film, look no further than this (absolutely free!) option.

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The Hundred-Foot Journey (PG) Fri-Tue 1-7 Wed 1
The Judge (14A) Fri-Tue 12:50-3:45-6:50-9:25 Wed 12:50
Kill the Messenger (14A) Fri-Tue 4:05-9:50
Maps to the Stars (18A) Fri-Tue 6:55-9:35
The Maze Runner (PG) Fri-Tue 1:10-3:40-7:05-9:45 Wed 1:10
Meet the Mormons (STC) Fri-Tue 4:20-8:45
No Films Showing Today (STC) Thu
Whiplash (14A) Fri-Tue 1:05-4:15-7:10-9:45

Crowfoot Crossing 91 Crowfoot Terrace

Annie (G) No Passes Fri-Sun 1-4-6:55-9:50 No Passes Mon-Tue 1-4-6:50-9:50 No Passes Wed 1-4-6:50 No Passes Thu 4-6:50-9:40
Big Hero 6 (G) Fri-Wed 12:50 Thu 2:30
Big Hero 6 3D (G) Fri-Sun 3:35-6:30-9:30 Mon-Tue 3:40-6:30-9:30 Wed 3:40 Thu 5:05-7:50-10:25
Bolshoi Ballet: The Nutcracker (STC) Sun 12:55
Exodus: Gods and Kings (PG) Fri-Tue 12-3:15-6:40-10 Wed 12-3:15 Thu 3:15
Exodus: Gods and Kings 3D (PG) Fri-Sun 12:20-3:40-7-10:20 Mon-Tue 12:15-3:35-6:55-10:15 Wed 12:15-3:35-6:55 Thu 6:55-10:15
Fred Claus (PG) Sat 11
The Gambler (14A) No Passes Wed 7:10 No Passes Thu 2:35-5:10-7:55-10:30
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies (PG) No Passes Fri-Thu 3:20-6:35
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies 3D (PG) No Passes Fri 12:05-12:35-2:35-3:55-5:55-7:15-9:15-9:55-10:35 No Passes Sat 11:15-12:05-12:35-2:35-3:55-5:55-7:15-9:15-9:55-10:35 No Passes Sun 12:05-12:35-2:35-3:55-5:55-7:15-9:15-9:55-10:35 No Passes Mon-Tue 12:05-12:35-2:35-3:50-5:55-7:05-9:15-9:55-10:20 No Passes Wed 12:05-12:35-12:45-3:50-3:55-7:05-7:15 No Passes Thu 3-3:45-6:15-7-9:30-9:50-10:20
Horrible Bosses 2 (14A) Fri 2:05-4:45-7:25-10:25 Sat 11:25-2:05-4:45-7:25-10:25 Sun 2:05-4:45-7:25-10:25 Mon 1:40-4:20-10:25 Tue 1:40-4:20-7:25-10:25 Wed 1:40-4:20-7:20
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1 (PG) Fri-Tue 1:45-4:40-7:35-10:30 Wed 1:45-4:40-7:35 Thu 4:35-7:30-10:25
Interstellar (PG) Fri 2:45-6:25-10:05 Sat-Sun 6:25-10:05 Mon-Tue 2:20-6-9:40 Wed 3:25
Into the Woods (STC) No Passes Wed 7:25 No Passes Thu 4:10-7:05-10
It's a Wonderful Life (STC) Sat 12:30 Mon 7 Wed 12:30
Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb (PG) No Passes Fri-Tue 12:10-2:40-5:10-7:40-10:10 No Passes Wed 12:10-2:40-5:10-7:40 No Passes Thu 2:40-5:15-7:40-10:10
Penguins of Madagascar (G) Fri-Wed 12:40 Thu 3:05
Penguins of Madagascar 3D (G) Fri-Sun 3-5:20-7:55-10:15 Mon-Tue 3-5:20-7:45-10:05 Wed 3-5:20-7:45 Thu 5:25-7:45-10:05
Unbroken (PG) No Passes Wed 7 No Passes Thu 3:35-6:45-10:05

Eau Claire Market, 200 Barlay Parade

Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) (14A) Fri 7:25-10:10 Sat-Sun 1:20-4:10-7:25-10:10 Mon 4:10-7:25-10:10 Tue 1:20-4:10-7:25-10:10 Wed 1:20-4:10-7:25 Thu 4:10-7:25-10:10
Foxcatcher (PG) Fri 7:15-10:20 Sat-Sun 12:40-3:50-7:15-10:20 Mon 3:50-7:15-10:20 Tue 12:40-3:50-7:15-10:20 Wed 12:40-3:50-7:15 Thu 3:50-7:15-10:20
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies 3D (PG) No Passes Fri 6:50-10 No Passes Sat-Sun 12:20-3:30-6:50-10 No Passes Mon 3:30-6:50-10 No Passes Tue 12:20-3:30-6:50-10 No Passes Wed 12:20-3:30-6:50 No Passes Thu 3:30-6:50-10
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1 (PG) Fri 6:40-9:30 Sat-Sun 12:30-3:20-6:40-9:30 Mon 3:20-6:40-9:30 Tue 12:30-3:20-6:40-9:30 Wed 12:30-3:20-6:40
The Imitation Game (PG) No Passes Thu 3:20-6:40-9:30
The Theory of Everything (G) Fri 6:30-9:20 Sat-Sun 12:50-3:40-6:30-9:20 Mon 3:40-6:30-9:20 Tue 12:50-3:40-6:30-9:20 Wed 12:50-3:40-6:30 Thu 3:40-6:30-9:20
Wild (14A) Fri 7:05-9:45 Sat-Sun 1:10-4-7:05-9:45 Mon 4-7:05-9:45 Tue 1:10-4-7:05-9:45 Wed 1:10-4-7:05 Thu 4-7:05-9:45

Landmark Cinemas 16 Country Hills, 388 Country Hills Blvd

Annie (G) Fri 1:20 Sat 10:35-1:20 Sun 10:35-1:20-4:10-7:10-10:05 Mon-Tue 1:20-4:10-7:10-10:05 Wed 1:20-4:10-7:10 Thu 3 Fri-Sat 4:10-7:10-10:05 Thu 6:30-9:20
Big Eyes (PG) Thu 4:50-7:50-10:30
Big Hero 6 (G) Fri 12:10-4-6:50 Sat-Sun 10:40-12:10-4-6:50 Mon-Tue 12:10-4-6:50 Wed 12:10-4
Exodus: Gods and Kings (PG) Fri 3-6:30-10 Sat-Sun 11:30-3-6:30-10 Mon-Tue 3-6:30-10 Wed 3-6:30 Thu 3:30
Exodus: Gods and Kings 3D (PG) Fri-Tue 12-3:30-7-10:15 Wed 12-3:30-7 Thu 7-10:15
The Gambler (14A) Wed 7:20 Thu 4:40-7:45-10:30
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies (PG) Fri 1:30-5-9 Sat-Sun 10:30-1:30-5-9 Mon-Tue 1:30-5-9 Wed 1:30-5 Thu 9 Thu 5
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies -- An IMAX 3D Experience (PG) Fri-Sat 11:45-3:15-6:45-10:15 Sun 11:45-3:15-6:45 Mon 11:45-3:15-6:45-10:15 Tue 11:45 Wed 11:45-3:15-6:45 Thu 3:15-6:45-10:15 Sun 10:15 Tue 3:15-6:45-10:15
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies 3D (PG) Fri 1-2:30-4:30-6-8-9:30 Sat 11-1:10-2:30-4:30-6-8-9:30 Sun 11-1-2:30-4:30-6-8-9:30 Mon-Tue 1-2:30-4:30-6-8-9:30 Wed 1-2:30-4:30-6 Thu 4:30-8
Horrible Bosses 2 (14A) Fri-Tue 9:50
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1 (PG) Fri-Mon 12:15-3:20-6:40-9:45 Tue 12:15 Wed 12:15-3:20-6:40 Thu 3:20-6:40-9:30 Tue 3:20-6:40-9:45
Interstellar (PG) Fri-Sat 12:45-4:20-9:20 Sun 4:20-9:20 Mon-Tue 12:45-4:20-9:20 Wed 12:45 Thu 8:30
Into the Woods (STC) Wed 7:30 Thu 4:10-7:10-10:05
Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb (PG) Fri 12:20-3:10-6:20-9:10 Sat 10:50-12:20-3:10-6:20-9:10 Sun 10:50-12:30-3:10-6:20-9:10-10:10 Mon-Tue 12:20-12:50-3:10-3:40-6:20-7:20-9:10-10:10 Wed 12:20-12:50-3:10-3:40-6:20-7:20 Thu 3:10-3:50-6:20-7:20-9:10-10 Fri-Sat 12:50-3:40-7:20-10:10 Sun 12:50-4:10-7:20
Penguins of Madagascar (G) Fri 1:45-4:40 Sat-Sun 10:55-1:45-4:40 Mon-Wed 1:45-4:40 Thu 3:45-6
Penguins of Madagascar 3D (G) Fri-Tue 7:30-9:55
PK (STC) Fri-Tue 2-6:10-9:40 Wed 2-6:10 Thu 6:10-9:40
Shakespeare's Globe on Screen: The Taming of the Shrew (STC) Sat 11
Top Five (18A) Fri 1:50-4:50-7:50-10:30 Sat 4:50-7:50-10:30 Sun-Tue 1:50-4:50-7:50-10:30 Wed 1:50-4:50
Unbroken (PG) Wed 7:30 Thu 3:40-6:50-9:55
Wild (14A) Fri-Tue 12:30-3:50-7:40-10:20 Wed 12:30-3:50-7:40 Thu 4:20-7:40-10:20

Landmark Cinemas 10 Shawnessy & EXTRA Calgarytudio, 100-16061 MacLeod Trail

Big Hero 6 (G) Fri-Mon 1:30-4:20-6:50-9:40 Tue 1:30-4:20-6:45-9:40 Wed 1:30-4:20
Exodus: Gods and Kings (PG) Fri-Tue 4-8 Wed 2:30 Thu 4:20
Exodus: Gods and Kings 3D (PG) Fri-Tue 12:15 Wed 6:30 Thu 8

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HWY: 9.8L/100 KM CITY: 12.9L/100 KM
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CH219045
CH003655
Sport 2.0T model shown
HWY: 7.4L/100 KM CITY: 10.4L/100 KM

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Landmark Cinemas 10 Shawnessy & EXTRA Calgarytudio, 100-16061 MacLeod Trail

The Gambler (14A) Thu 4-6:50-9:40
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies (PG) Fri-Tue 11:15-2:45-6:30-10 Wed 11:15-2:45-6:15 Thu 2:45
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies 3D (PG) Fri-Tue 12:45-4:30-8:15 Wed 1:45-6:45 Thu 6:30-10 Fri-Tue 11:45-3:15-7-10:30 Wed 11:45-3:15-7 Thu 3:15-7-10:30
Horrible Bosses 2 (14A) Fri-Sat 3-6:20-9:50 Sun 12-3-6:20-9:50 Mon 3 Tue 12-3-6:20-9:50 Wed 12-3 Mon 12-6:20-9:50
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1 (PG) Fri-Tue 12-3-7:30-10:25 Wed 12-3-7:30 Thu 3-6:20-9:30
The Imitation Game (PG) Thu 4:10-7:20-10:20
Into the Woods (STC) Wed 7:10 Thu 3:45-7:10-10:15
Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb (PG) Fri-Sun 12:30-1:15-3:30-4:15-6:40-7:15-9:30-10:15 Mon 12:30-3:30-4:15-6:40-7:15-9:30-10:15 Tue 12:30-1:15-3:30-4:15-6:40-7:15-9:30-10:15 Wed 12:30-1:15-3:30-4:15-6:40-7:15 Thu 4:30-7:30-10:10 Mon 1:15
Penguins of Madagascar (G) Fri-Wed 1-3:45
Penguins of Madagascar 3D (G) Fri-Tue 6:15-9:15
Shakespeare's Globe on Screen: The Taming of the Shrew (STC) Sat 11

Unbroken (PG) Wed 7 Thu 3:20-6:40-9:50

Globe Cinema, 617-8 Avenue

Closed for the Holiday (STC) Wed-Thu
Elsa & Fred (PG) Fri 6:50-9 Sat 3-6:50-9 Sun 12:50-3-6:50-9 Mon-Tue 6:50-9
Force Majeure (14A) Fri 7-9:20 Sat-Sun 1-3:20-7-9:20 Mon-Tue 7-9:20
Night Terrors (STC) Fri 11:55

Scotiabank Chinook

6455 MacLeod Trail

Annie (G) No Passes Fri-Tue 1:10-4:10-7:10-10:10 No Passes Wed 12:35-3:45-6:45-9:45 No Passes Thu 1:10-4:10-7:10-10:10
Big Hero 6 (G) Thu 1:50
Big Hero 6 3D (G) Fri-Tue 11:40-2:20-5:05-7:45-10:25 Wed 11:40-2:20-5 Thu 4:30-7:15-10:05
Bolshoi Ballet: The Nutcracker (STC) Sun 12:55
Dumb and Dumber To (PG) Fri-Tue 1-4:15 Wed 12-2:50
Exodus: Gods and Kings (PG) Fri-Tue 11:45-3:15-6:40-10 Wed 12:45-4:15-7:50 Thu 5:30
Exodus: Gods and Kings 3D (PG) Fri-Tue 12:40-4-7:20-10:40 Wed 1:30-5:30-9 Thu 1:45-9
Fred Claus (PG) Sat 11
Fury (14A) Fri-Sun 7:10-10:15 Mon 10:15 Tue 7:10-10:15
The Gambler (14A) No Passes Wed 7-9:40 No Passes Thu 2-4:50-7:40-10:30
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies (PG) No Passes Fri-Wed 11:20-2:40-6 No Passes Thu 2:40-6
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies -- An IMAX 3D Experience (PG) No Passes Fri-Tue 12:20-3:40-7-10:20 No Passes Wed 2:20-5:40-9 No Passes Thu 3:40-7-10:20
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies 3D (PG) No Passes Fri-Tue 11:50-3:10-6:30-9:20-9:50 No Passes Wed 1-4:40-8-9:20 No Passes Thu 3:10-6:30-9:20-9:50 No Passes Fri-Tue 12:50-4-7:30-10:50 No Passes Wed 11:40-3-6:20-9:40 No Passes Thu 1-4:10-7:30-10:50
Horrible Bosses 2 (14A) Fri-Tue 12:10-2:50-5:30-8:10-10:50 Wed 12:30-3:20-6-9:15 Thu 1:25-4:15-7:25-10:15
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1 (PG) Fri 12:20-1:30-3:20-4:25-6:20-7:20-9:30-10:20 Sat 1:30-3:20-4:25-6:20-7:20-9:30-10:20 Sun 12:10-3:10-4:25-6:10-7:20-9:20-10:20 Mon-Tue 12:20-1:30-3:20-4:25-6:20-7:20-9:30-10:20 Wed 2-3:20-5:30-8:50 Thu 1:20-4:20-7:20-10:20
The Imitation Game (PG) No Passes Thu 1:25-4:20-7:15-10:25

Top Five. CONTRIBUTED

Interstellar (PG) Fri-Tue 1:15-5-9:15 Wed 1-4:45-8:30 Thu 1:15-5-9:15
Into the Woods (STC) No Passes Wed 7:35 No Passes Thu 1:30-4:25-7:30-10:25
It's a Wonderful Life (STC) Sat 12:30 Mon 7 Wed 12:30
Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb (PG) No Passes Fri-Tue 11:30-12:15-2-2:45-4:30-5:15-7:05-7:50-9:45-10:20 No Passes Wed 11:30-12:15-2-2:45-4:30-5:15-7:05-7:50-9:45 No Passes Thu 2-4:30-7:05-10
Penguins of Madagascar (G) Fri-Tue 12:45 Wed 12:40 Thu 1:10
Penguins of Madagascar 3D (G) Fri-Tue 3:10-5:35-8-10:25 Wed 3:10-5:35-8 Thu 3:35-6:50-9:50
Royal Ballet: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (STC) Sat 1:15
Top Five (18A) Fri-Tue 12-2:35-5:10-7:45-10:30 Wed 12:45-3:45-6:20-9:10 Thu 1-3:45-6:20-9:10
Unbroken (PG) No Passes Wed 6:45-9:50 No Passes Thu 1-4:15-7:25-10:40

Plaza Theatre 1133 Kensington Rd. N.W.

Awake: The Life of Yogananda (G) Fri 7 Sun 9 Tue 7-9
No Films Showing Today (STC) Sat Mon Wed-Thu

Sunridge Spectrum 2555 32nd Street

Annie (G) No Passes Fri-Sat 1-4-7-10:10 No Passes Sun 1-4-7:10-10:10 No Passes Mon-Tue 1-4-7:10-10 No Passes Wed 12:55-4-6:55 No Passes Thu 12:50-4-6:55-9:45
Big Hero 6 (G) Fri-Tue 12:25-3:10-6:30-9:15 Wed 12:25-3:10 Thu 1:40-4:45-7:30-10:10
Dumb and Dumber To (PG) Fri-Sun 12:50-3:40-6:45 Mon-Tue 12:50-3:40-6:50 Wed 12:50-3:40
Exodus: Gods and Kings (PG) Fri-Tue 2:30-6:20-9:40 Wed 12:40-4:10 Thu 3:25
Exodus: Gods and Kings 3D (PG) Fri-Sat 12:05-3:30-6:50-10:15 Sun 3:30-6:50-10:15 Mon-Tue 12:05-3:25-6:45-10:10 Wed 12:05-3:25-6:45 Thu 12:05-6:45-10:05
Fred Claus (PG) Sat 11
The Gambler (14A) No Passes Wed 8 No Passes Thu 12:40-4:10-7:15-9:55
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies (PG) No Passes Fri 12-3:20-6:40 No Passes Sat 11-12-3:20-6:40 No Passes Sun-Tue 12-3:15-6:35 No Passes Wed 12-3:15-6:30 No Passes Thu 11:45-3:05-6:25
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies 3D (PG) No Passes Fri-Sat 12:40-3:55-7:10-10:30 No Passes Sun-Tue 12:30-3:45-7-10:20 No Passes Wed 12:30-3:45-7:25 No Passes Thu 12:20-3:40-7-10:20 No Passes Fri-Sun 1:20-2-4:40-6-8-9:20-10 No Passes Mon-Tue 1:20-2-4:40-6-8-9:20-9:55 No Passes Wed 1-2-4:15-6-7:50 No Passes Thu 1-4:30-8-9:45
Horrible Bosses 2 (14A) Fri-Tue 1:40-4:30-7:40-10:30 Wed 1:40-4:30-8:10 Thu 12:30-3:30-6:20-9:10
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1 (PG) Fri-Sat 1:10-4:10-7:20-10:25 Sun-Tue 1:10-4:10-7:25-10:25 Wed 1:10-4:05-7 Thu 1:10-4:05-7:05-10
Interstellar (PG) Fri-Tue 9:30
Into the Woods (STC) No Passes Wed 7:10 No Passes Thu 1:20-4:25-7:25-10:25
Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb (PG) No Passes Fri-Sun 12:10-2:40-5:10-7:45-10:20 No Passes Mon-Tue 12:10-2:40-5:10-7:45-10:15 No Passes Wed 1:20-4:40-7:40 No Passes Thu 11:55-2:30-5:05-7:40-10:15
Penguins of Madagascar (G) Fri-Tue 1:25 Wed-Thu 1:30
Penguins of Madagascar 3D (G) Fri-Sun 4:20-7:30-9:55 Mon-Tue 4:20-7:30-9:50 Wed 4:20-6:40 Thu 4:20-6:40-9:15
PK (STC) Fri-Sat 12:30-4:15-8:10 Sun 12:55-4:25-8:10 Mon-Tue 12:20-4:05-8:10 Wed 12:15-3:50-7:20 Thu 1:45-6:10-9:40
Unbroken (PG) No Passes Wed 7:45 No Passes Thu 12:10-3:20-6:35-9:50

Westhills 10 165 Stewart Green

Big Eyes (PG) Thu 3:30-6:30-9:30
Big Hero 6 (G) Fri-Tue 12:45-3:30-6:45-9:35 Wed 12:45-3:30-6:45
Exodus: Gods and Kings (PG) Fri-Thu 3:35
Exodus: Gods and Kings 3D (PG) Fri-Tue 12:15-6:55-10:15 Wed 12:15-6:55 Thu 6:55-10:15
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies (PG) No Passes Fri-Thu 3:40-7
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies 3D (PG) No Passes Fri-Tue 1:20-3:10-4:40-6:30-8-9:50 No Passes Wed 1:20-3:10-4:40-6:30 No Passes Thu 4:40-8 No Passes Fri-Tue 12:20-10:20 No Passes Wed 12:20 No Passes Thu 10:20
Horrible Bosses 2 (14A) Fri-Wed 1:15-4-7:15
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1 (PG) Fri-Tue 12:50-3:50-6:50-9:55 Wed 12:50-3:50-6:50 Thu 3:50-6:50-9:55
The Imitation Game (PG) No Passes Thu 3:45-6:45-9:35
Interstellar (PG) Fri-Tue 9:55
Into the Woods (STC) No Passes Thu 4:05-7:05-10:10
Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb (PG) No Passes Fri-Tue 12:30-3:20-6:40-9:20 No Passes Wed 12:30-3:20-6:40 No Passes Thu 3:20-6:40-9:20
Penguins of Madagascar (G) Fri-Wed 12:40
Penguins of Madagascar 3D (G) Fri-Tue 3:45-7:05-9:40 Wed 3:45-7:05 Thu 3:45-7:05-9:40
The Theory of Everything (G) Fri-Tue 1:10-4:10-7:10-10:10 Wed 1:10-4:10-7:10
Unbroken (PG) No Passes Thu 3:55-7:15-10:25

Gossip

NED EHRBAR

METRO'S TAKE ON THE WORLD OF CELEBRITIES

Joel not sure Benji and Diaz are a match Madden in heaven

Cameron Diaz and heavily tattooed Good Charlotte twin Benji Madden have been dating since May, but apparently that's long enough to know he's a keeper because a source tells the National Enquirer that Diaz and Madden are "planning their wedding for early in the new year. They've been telling close friends in recent weeks about their plans, but it's very hush-hush." Well, I mean, it was very hush-hush until now. Way to go, anonymous source.

Not everyone is thrilled, though, chief among them Benji's twin brother, Joel, who "actually likes Cameron a lot and thinks they're a good match, but he doesn't want Benji to rush into something so quickly."

Which is fair. I mean, has she even been around them long enough to conclusively tell them apart? Twins are hard, man. Also, I feel like there's a whole vault of quotes from Diaz about marriage and family that could be dug up for this.

Like 2012, when she told Esquire marriage "just wasn't the thing I was drawn to." Or how about two months ago, when she told Marie Clare, "I'm not looking for a husband or marriage or not looking for that stuff. I'm living, not thinking what I should or shouldn't be doing with my life." What a difference Thanksgiving makes.

Cameron Diaz ALL PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

Funny or Die sweetens the podcast with Serial send-up

Did the finale of Serial not give you the satisfaction you were looking for? Funny or Die has you covered. The humour site taps into the obsession built up around the This American Life podcast and its highly anticipated conclusion.

Michaela Watkins plays Serial host Sarah Koenig as she dodges eager fans and scrambles to come up with a satisfying resolution before finally snapping:

"What do you want? I do a podcast! It was supposed to be for four people. Do you think if I thought this was going to be anything I would have MailChimp sponsor us?" she rants. "What do you want to know? Do you want to know who did it? Fine. It was me! I did it!"

Well, I don't think anyone saw that coming.

Michaela Watkins

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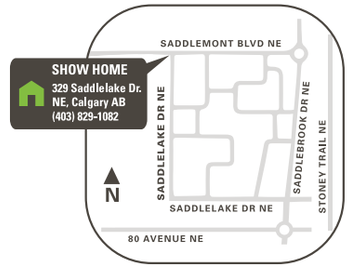

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Ricardo is a Canadian chef, television host and author on a mission: To unite people through the pleasure of food. Discover his delicious and simple recipes every Friday — just in time for the weekend

A snappy serving of sophistication

This recipe serves four. COURTESY RICARDOCUISINE.COM

Turkey Cutlets with Parsnip Purée and Honeyed Cranberries.

This holiday dinner will impress the pickiest of eaters

RICARDO COOKS
Chef Ricardo
Ricardo Magazine

Surprise! The in-laws are coming over for dinner tonight!

Step 1: Do not panic. Step 2: Whip up this show-stopping recipe. Despite the fact that it looks, and tastes, like you've been at it all day, it comes together in about an hour.

Parsnip Purée

1. In a saucepan, soften the onion in half the butter. Add parsnips and milk and bring to a boil. Simmer, uncovered, about 20 minutes or until the parsnips are tender. Drain. In a food processor, purée until smooth with remaining butter. Season with salt and pepper. Keep warm.

Honeyed Cranberries

1. In a skillet, caramelize honey for 1 minute. Add cranberries and coat well. Continue cooking until cranberries begin to burst. Set aside.

Turkey

1. In skillet, brown the turkey cutlets on each side in half the butter until the meat is cooked. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside on a warm plate.

2. In same skillet, soften shallot in the remaining butter. Sprinkle with the flour and cook, stirring, until golden brown. Add the broth and sherry and bring to a boil, stirring with a whisk. Reduce by half. Season with salt and pepper. Serve with the parsnip purée, honeyed cranberries and a green vegetable. **FOLLOW RICARDO ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND ON RICARDOCUISINE.COM OR SUBSCRIBE TO HIS MAGAZINE'S ENGLISH EDITION, WHICH LAUNCHED THIS SEPTEMBER!**

Ingredients

Parsnip Purée
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup (57 g) butter
- 1 lb (454 g) parsnips, peeled and sliced
- 1 1/2 cups (375 ml) milk

Honeyed Cranberries
- 1/4 cup (60 ml) honey
- 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries

Turkey
- 1 1/2 lb (675 g) turkey cutlets
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 2 tbsp (18 g) all-purpose flour
- 2 cups (500 ml) beef broth
- 1/4 cup (60 ml) sherry

Liquid Assets

Complement a busy meal

LIQUID ASSETS
Peter Rockwell
@therealwineguy
liquidassets@eastlink.ca

Short of using their juice to make a cosmopolitan cocktail, I've never had much love for cranberries.

While cranberry sauce may be a festive season staple, my palate finds its tart, tangy flavour unsettlingly dominant when it shares my holiday plate.

Typically a side dish, Ricardo's recipe this week is piled high with honeyed cranberry goodness, which makes it a perfect partner for a medium-bodied white wine like a Riesling.

As good as that sounds, I still prefer the big bird hitting my table covered in gravy and accompanied by an overabundance of veggies and a heaping helping of mushroom-laden dressing.

I reach for a Pinot Noir when it comes to a wine pairing for such a busy meal. A white wine lover's red, a good Pinot works with both the savoury and sweeter elements of any Christmas dinner.

New Zealand's Oyster Bay 2013 Marlborough Pinot Noir ($19.95 - $21.99) is sustainably produced, with lip-smacking strawberry fruit, round earthy expression and long thick finish.

Happy holidays! **PRICES REFLECT THE RANGE ACROSS THE COUNTRY. SOME PRODUCTS MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE IN ALL PROVINCES.**

Beauty is in the eye of the holiday shopper

Help your gal get all dolled up. Check out these get-more-gorgeous gifts for her

JANINE FALCON
For Metro

Conair InfinitiPro 3Q Hair Dryer
Quick and quiet, this dryer delivers a super-fast pro-quality dry job with less damage, and lower heat. $129 at Target, target.ca; Walmart, walmart.ca; and major drugstores.

Kerastase Discipline
This at-home regimen supports a salon treatment that cuts down on frizz, blow-dry effort and time. From $40, kerastase.ca.

Fresh Dare to Bare Lip Ritual Set
Kiss dry lips goodbye with lip scrub, conditioning lip serum, balms and moisturizing shine treatment. $53 at Sephora, sephora.com.

NARS Virtual Domination Blush & Bronzer Palette
Four flattering powder blushes plus the popular Laguna bronzer. $75 at Sephora, sephora.com.

Tweezerman Brush iQ Makeup Brushes
These handsome tools feature soft, synthetic bristles made of DuPont filaments. $24 to $85 at tweezerman.ca.

YSL Palette Collector Wild Edition
This covetable palette houses shades for eyes, cheeks and lips. $100 at Hudson's Bay, thebay.com; Sephora, sephora.com; and Holt Renfrew, holtrenfrew.com.

Facial Cleansing Brushes
New facial cleansing systems are gentle on skin and kind to the wallet, too. Clinique, $95 at Hudson's Bay, thebay.com; Philips PureRadiance, $149.99 at London Drugs, londondrugs.com.

Birchbox Canada
Finally here, this respected e-tailer curates prestige, niche and up-and-coming beauty brands, and introduces them via personalized sample boxes. Three-month subscription, $44.85 flat rate at birchbox.ca.

Crabtree & Evelyn Sensational Six Hand Therapy Musical Tin
Six popular purse-size hand creams in a keepsake tin that plays Sleigh Ride. $35 at Crabtree & Evelyn, crabtree-evelyn.ca.

Shupette Karl Lagerfeld for Shu Uemura
This creamy-powder Silk Cushion Cheek colour playfully spotlights Lagerfeld's pampered kitty, Shupette. $35 at Hudson's Bay, the bay.com; and Holt Renfrew, holtrenfrew.com.

Top, from left: Kerastase Discipline; Tweezerman Brush iQ Makeup Brushes; bottom, Crabtree & Evelyn Sensational Six Hand Therapy Musical Tin.

Correction

The SousVide Supreme was incorrectly identified in last week's gift guide. Metro apologizes for the error.

Well, hello there, handsome man

Grooming gifts. Great skin and hair products for the guy in your life

Foreo Luna for Men
This sonic, waterproof, medical-grade silicone device delivers deep cleansing, skin conditioning, and facial massaging in just one minute. $229 at Murale, murale.ca.

Braun Series 5 Shaver
This electric razor boasts 20 per cent more power than previous editions for more efficient results. From $189 at drug, specialty, and mass retailers.

Kent MG3NSM Military Brush
This hairbrush is made with shine-enhancing natural black bristles set in an oval beechwood base. $30 at menessentials.ca.

Philips Hair Clipper Series 700
This rechargeable unit has titanium blades, adjustable beard/hair combs and is double the speed of its predecessors. From $49.99 at Canadian Tire, canadiantire.ca; Walmart, walmart.ca; and Loblaws, loblaws.ca.

Dr. Roebucks Body & Handwash
This niche natural brand features doctor-developed formulas suitable for sensitive skin. $18.95 at Murale, murale.ca.

Skyn Iceland Hydro Cool Firming Face Gels
Dosed with peptides and hydration boosters, these 10-minute-fix transdermal face patches soften forehead furrows and smile brackets. $38.50 for an eight-pack at Shoppers Drug Mart, shoppersdrugmart.com; and Murale, murale.ca.

Kiehl's Grab and Go for Him:
Stocked with travel-size scrub soap, face wash, shave cream, moisturizer, and no-shine lip balm, this kit is ideal for the gym bag or on vacation. $37 at kiehls.ca.

Hermès Hermessence in Cuir D'Ange
Not your typical scent of smoky leather notes, this eau de toilette evokes "light, supple leather to clothe and shoe a winged god." $260 at Hermès, canada-en.hermes.com.

JANINE FALCON/ FOR METRO

From left: Kent MG3NSM Military Brush; Braun Series 5 Shaver; Foreo Luna for Men.

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metro HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE 2014

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Make scents for the holidays

Perfume and cologne.
Top picks for 2014 holiday gift giving

MICHELLE WILLIAMS
For Metro

The gift of fragrance is the perfect choice for the holiday season. It's intensely personal — "every time you wear a scent, you're reminded of the person who gave it to you," said Lee-Ann Hodgekins, theperfumeexpert.com founder.

"Scent is also one of the strongest links to memory, reminding us of special moments and fond times."

SEASONAL

If choosing a fragrance gift for that special someone this holiday season seems daunting, consider this one simple tip: Use the hints of the season and environment around you. "Think about the fiery colours of the harvest, the crisp cool air, the dry woods and roaring fires," Hodgekins said.

"Also, think about the typical foods at this time of year: Dark berries, festive citrus, smooth caramels, toasted nuts, warming spices, and sweet intoxicating elixirs."

Here are some top trends and favourite fragrances for this holiday season:

Rose is always popular — this year's rose scents are deeper and richer. "Combined with deep woods, smoky nuances and decadent delights, these rose fragrances are ultra-alluring and perfect for those who love traditional scents, but also appreciate the more sexy and mysterious notes of perfume," Hodgekins said.

Lee-Ann's picks:

- **Aerin Lauder's Evening Rose:** Combined with dark berries and smoky incense, this rose scent is the perfect romantic fragrance for winter, $125.
- **The Body Shop's White Musk Smoky Rose** is a new twist on classic rose with hints of dry tobacco and comforting musk, $17-$25.
- **Chanel's Egoïste (for men):** Rich rose paired with masculine notes of peppery spices and dry woods, $103.
- **Paco Rabanne's 1 million (for men):** Romantic rose with spicy cinnamon, vibrant orange, rich leather, and deep woods, $66-$88.

FRUITY

Fruit for winter — dark, lush fruits prevail over citrus and tropical scents of summer. "Notes of dark cherries, blackberries or plums are great for those who don't like heady florals or prefer more natural and earthy scents," Hodgekins said.

Lee-Ann's picks:

- **Coco Figue by Comptoir Sud Pacifique:** A scrumptious mix of sweet fig, smooth vanilla and almond, $44.
- **Vera Wang's Be Jeweled Rouge:** Juicy winter berries combined with nutty pralines, backed by comforting musk and woods, $49.
- **Victoria Secret's Victoria:** Features two of this season's trends: Rose and ripe berries, $52-$68.
- **Ralph Lauren Polo Red (for men):** Festive cranberry mixed with warm amber, sweet saffron and rich coffee extract, $78.

SPIRITED

The season's most interesting trend — spirits like sweet rum, smooth whisky or gin are delicately combined with smoky tobaccos, glowing ambers and other decadent delights. "They're perfect for those who gravitate to more mature and sophisticated scents while also liking to try new things," Hodgekins said.

Lee-Ann's picks:

- **Carolina Herrera's 212 VIP:** Intoxicating combination of sweet rum, vanilla, and passion fruit, $68.
- **Tom Ford's Tobacco Oud (for men):** Earthy oud wood mixed with bold tobacco, and smoky whisky, $235.

From left to right: Chanel's Egoïste, $103; Aerin Lauder's Evening Rose, $125; Tom Ford's Tobacco Oud, $235; Vera Wang's Be Jeweled, $49.

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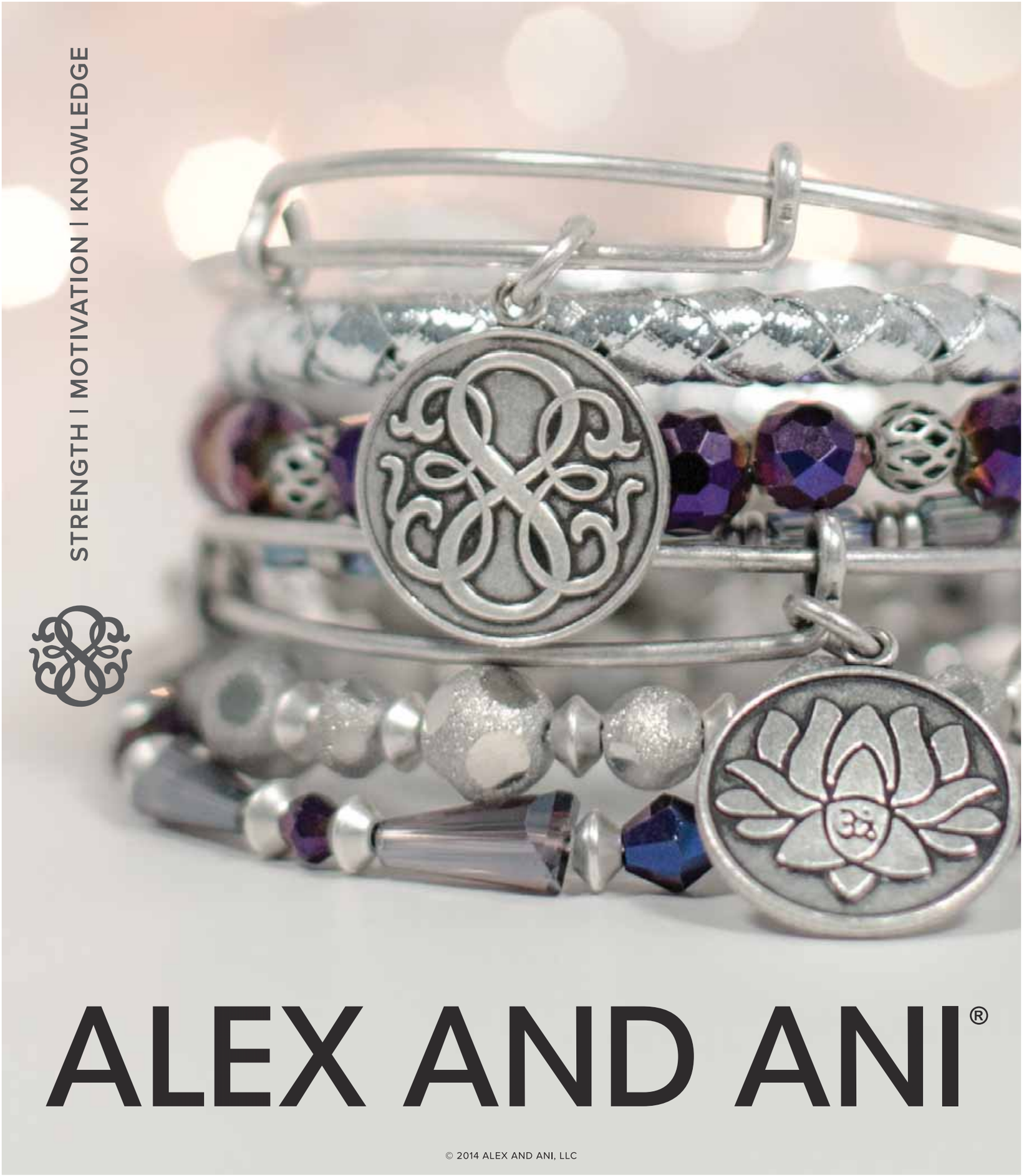

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Go big or go home

Time is of the essence.
You can wipe away guilt with an extravagant gift

RICK MCGINNIS
For Metro

Still searching for that perfect gift with little time left? Go big or go home with a new set of wheels. SHUTTERSTOCK

Chances are we all know someone who had their Christmas shopping done a month ago. They are organized, thrifty people, and while we might make contrite noises about following their example, chances are we never will, mostly because, deep in our hearts, we think their prudent approach to holiday shopping is not only smug and off-putting, but a subversive attack on the spirit of the season.

In a CIBC-Harris/Decima poll released last year, 69 per cent of Canadians admitted they hadn't finished their Christmas shopping four days before the holiday, while a further 22 per cent said they hadn't even started.

The Greek poet Pindar once wrote that "every gift which is given, even though it is small, is in reality great if it is given with affection."

But how much affection can there be in a gift ordered from a catalogue last January, stockpiled in the back of a closet without any idea who it was for, or sought out at sale prices?

A gift bought late is a gift bought after considerable thought. But there are people on our list who remain there until the eleventh hour because their wants are either modest or immense, or their good fortune and self-reliance means that they visibly lack nothing.

These people may be blessed, but when we're sprinting across a crowded mall parking lot hoping to find the last case of vintage Sauterne or hand-blown Nebbiolo wine glasses, we silently curse the day they entered our lives.

For most of us, the fallback gift for these people is a gift card. Today, they come in every brand and denomination, and can be bought in the checkout line at almost any drugstore or supermarket. But what if the unchecked name on your list is someone who wouldn't be satisfied with $25 worth of iTunes downloads or just enough cash to buy an impact driver from Home Depot?

Starbucks unveiled a $450 US stainless steel gift card last year, named the Starbucks Metal Card, which will get you a lot of coffee but not a lot of envious looks from the folks in line who just want their latte before the last seat gets taken.

If we're honest with ourselves, we might be dragging our feet out of guilt, but nothing wipes away that feeling like a really extravagant gift. Raj Rajani, sales manager at Grand Touring Autos in Toronto, said that licensing and titles make it almost impossible to impulse buy a Jaguar, a Bentley, an Aston Martin, or a Range Rover from their showroom in the last hours of the 24th, but if you come in at least a day or two earlier, they will help arrange a really big surprise.

He said that parents buying for their kids will look at the Range Rover Evoque ($75,000 and up), while husbands buying for their wives will go right to the Aston Martin Vantage (starts at $140,000), the Bentley GTC ($380,000 before options), or the Jaguar F-type Coupe (starts at $125,000), which is a big hit with older couples

Sales staff at Grand Touring have oversized bows to gift-wrap the car, and will put on a little show for the spouse who gets dragged into the showroom "just to have a little look, honey."

Mostly, though, Rajani says that last-minute shoppers will take the keys home to put under the tree.

Talk about high performance

Screen time. These smartphones have tons of features to please the tech wiz on your list

MIKE YAWNEY
For Metro

Smartphones are a surefire way to light up a tech lover's eyes this holiday season. With so many to choose from, the only problem is deciding which one to buy. Here are some of the best performing smartphones and accessories for the techie on your list.

iPhone 6 Plus
$859 and up (no contract)
It's thin, it's light, and is now the largest member of the iPhone family. The extra large 5.7-inch screen gives plenty of real estate to get work done. Apple has upgraded the camera with an improved sensor, resulting in stunning photos, especially in low-light conditions. The addition of NFC ensures you will be able to use Apple's new mobile payment system, Apple Pay, when it launches in Canada.

Samsung Galaxy Alpha
$699.95 (no contract)
It's the perfect smartphone for those who are fashion forward. This sleek, bold phone is less than seven mm thick, making it one of the thinnest phones released by Samsung. The Alpha can sense when the battery is getting low and will turn off non-essential functions to conserve power.

LG G3
$599.99 (no contract)
The first smartphone in Canada to have a screen with four times the resolution of HD displays. The LG G3 features a customizable on-screen keyboard to help you type faster, plus a camera that uses a laser to focus in the blink of an eye. Those concerned about privacy will enjoy Knock Code, which lets users secure their device by tapping an invisible pattern on screen.

Sony Xperia Z3
$699.95 (no contract)
A smartphone for those who love photography. This waterproof and dust-resistant Android smartphone stands out from the crowd with its 20.7 MP camera and ability to shoot 4K video. On top of that, gamers who own a Playstation 4 can use the phone to take their gaming to another room with the PS Remote Play feature.

Nexus 6
$749 and up (no contract)
Looking for a powerful smartphone with a super-sized screen? The Nexus 6 features a six-inch display and will be the first smartphone in Canada to run Android 5.0 Lollipop. Dual front-facing speakers create immersive sound, plus you can get six hours of use from only 15 minutes of charging.

Bottom to top: Blackberry Passport, $750; Sony Xperia Z3, $699.95; V-Moda Vamp Verza, $598; *LG G3, $599.99; Olloclip lens, $69.99 and up; iPhone 6 Plus, $859 and up.*

V-Moda Vamp Verza
$598
Not happy with the quality of music on your smartphone? This unique case not only powers your device with its built-in battery, it also converts your music files into analog for a pure listening experience.

Olloclip 4-in-1 lens
$69.99 and up
Cameras on smartphones are wonderful, but their fixed lenses create limitations. The Olloclip allows you to get creative with your photos by adding fisheye, macro and wide-angles lenses.

Blackberry Passport
$750 (no contract)
It may look a little odd, but for those who prefer a physical keyboard on their smartphone, there's no better choice. The 4.5-inch touchscreen shows more characters per line than any other smartphone to make reading easier. The keyboard is also touch enabled, so a simple swipe across the keys can scroll web pages and more.

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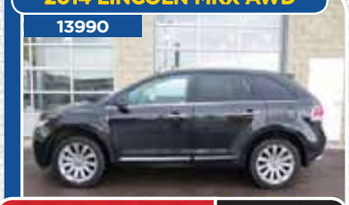

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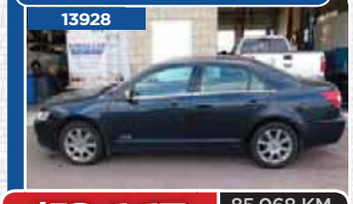

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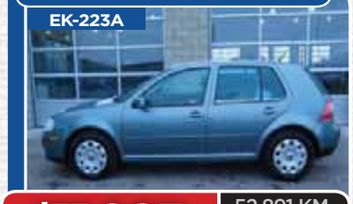

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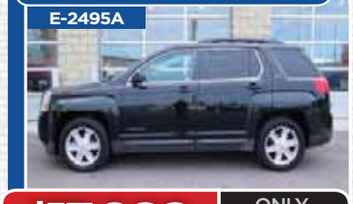

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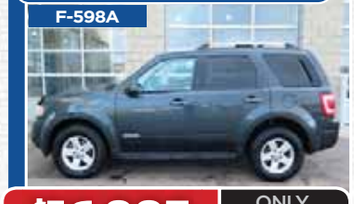

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2010 VW PASSAT CC HIGHLINE
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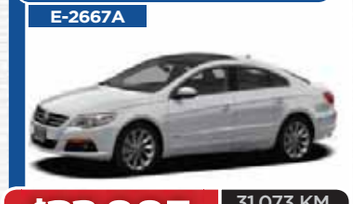

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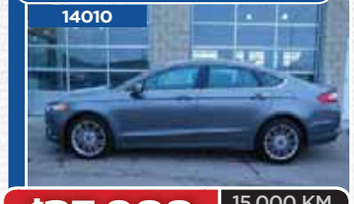
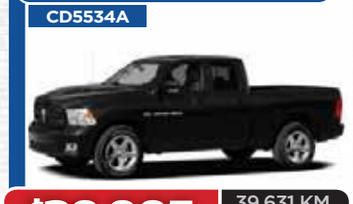
2014 FORD FUSION AWD
14010



$25,988 | 15,000 KM | $389/BW | ECOBOOST • NAV

2012 RAM 1500 SPORT 4X4
CD5534A



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NBA

Rondo leaving Boston for Dallas

The Boston Celtics traded point guard Rajon Rondo to Dallas on Thursday night, cutting ties with the last remnant of their last NBA championship while giving Dirk Nowitzki and the Mavericks a chance at another title.

"Welcome to Rajon Rondo the newest member of the Dallas Mavericks," team owner Mark Cuban wrote on the social media application Cyber Dust. Cuban also thanked the three departing players, calling them "Amazing players and better people."

The Celtics will reportedly send Rondo and Dwight Powell to Dallas for Jameer Nelson, Jae Crowder, Brandan Wright and two draft picks. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CFL

Former Als exec up for commish?

Skip Prince has thrown his hat into the ring to be the next CFL commissioner.

The Canadian Press has learned the former Montreal Alouettes executive has expressed an interest in the CFL's top job. Two league sources said Thursday that Prince has contacted the search committee mandated with finding commissioner Mark Cohon's successor.

CFL spokesman Jamie Dykstra wouldn't confirm either Prince's interest or Tom Anselmi's candidacy for the commissioner's job. There have been reports that Anselmi, the former Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment boss, has been approached about the position. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Lazar gets go-ahead to join Canada juniors

'Win-win' situation.
Sens allow young centre to play in world junior championship

Curtis Lazar averages 12:45 of ice time each game as a fourth-line centre for the Senators. GETTY IMAGES FILE

Curtis Lazar is leaving the Ottawa Senators to play for Canada at the world junior championship, a decision those involved consider a "win-win."

The 19-year-old Lazar gets the experience of playing against the best junior players in the world, Canada gets a polished top-six forward and the Senators hope to benefit down the road from the development their top prospect gets from his second of these tournaments.

"He's going to play a more prominent role," Senators coach Dave Cameron said. "With us he's in the bottom six, playing a safe role. There he's going to be a go-to guy. That's a real world-class tournament on a huge stage, so all those factors are going to make him a better player."

Lazar was Ottawa's fourth-line centre averaging 12:45 a game, second-lowest on the team ahead of only Chris Neil. Wednesday night at the New Jersey Devils, Lazar skated 15 shifts for 8:30, his lowest totals of his rookie season.

Quoted

"He's obviously going to be a huge leader, if not the biggest leader on this team."

Connor McDavid on Curtis Lazar

Hockey Canada had discussions with the Senators this week about getting Lazar, but the organization didn't find out until Thursday morning that he'd be joining the world junior team. Understandably, those in charge of the team are thrilled to add Lazar to a group already favoured to win gold on home ice.

"He is a big piece of the puzzle," said Scott Salmond, Hockey Canada's vice-president of hockey operations.

"He will come in here, hopefully with a lot of confidence and a lot of experience of having been here last year. We expect him to be a leader, and we expect he is going to give our group a boost." THE CANADIAN PRESS

'Bittersweet' timing

Lazar called it "bittersweet" leaving the Senators in the middle of the season, especially considering the upheaval lately with the firing of Paul MacLean and the hiring of Cameron as coach. But he relishes the idea of becoming that "go-to-guy" at the world juniors.

- "The Ottawa Senators, I'm happy to be here, I love to be here and I feel I'm going to have a long, healthy career here with them," said Lazar, who has a goal and six assists this season. "Two weeks it's not going to make that much of a difference."

Roughriders extend Ricky Foley's contract

The Saskatchewan Roughriders signed star defensive end Ricky Foley to a contract extension on Thursday. BRENT JUST/GETTY IMAGES

On Thursday, the Riders signed 32-year-old defensive end Ricky Foley to a contract extension after one of the best seasons of his career.

With last week's re-signing of Tearrius George and John Chick being under contract, Saskatchewan has solidified its defensive line heading into the 2015 campaign.

The Riders posted a CFL-high 61 sacks this past season.

Foley said he knew "about 15 minutes" after Saskatchewan fell 18-10 to Edmonton in the West Division semifinal that he wanted to return rather than retire or become a free agent Feb. 10.

Still in the game

"We're still excited by what we're capable of."

Saskatchewan Roughriders defensive end Ricky Foley made 12 sacks and 54 defensive tackles last year but thinks he and the Riders can still do better.

"I think collectively as soon as the season was done and we realized we were going home ... the sombreness turned to almost anger, like 'Man, we could have won, we should have won, this sucks. OK we're coming back next year,'" Foley said during a news conference.

"I know me and T-George, we had a moment where we knew we would be better next year, and we were going to come back and do this." THE CANADIAN PRESS

4 SPORTS

Canadian skeleton racer Elizabeth Vathje trains on Wednesday for the upcoming World Cup event in Calgary, starting Friday. JEFF MCINTOSH/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Years of practice pay off for Vathje

Sliding home. Calgary native who started in skeleton at 14 tries her home track on Friday

Elisabeth Vathje may have hit a triple in her first at-bat in skeleton's big leagues, but the slider is hardly an overnight success.

Skeleton, and its sporting relative bobsled, commonly draw athletes later in their lives from track and field and other explosive sports.

Vathje is unique in that she began sliding head first on a sled at 14.

Now 20, the Calgarian won a silver medal in her World Cup debut last week in Lake Placid, N.Y. Her second stop on the World Cup circuit is on her home track Friday in Calgary.

"You go to your first World Cup, you expect the jitters," Vathje says. "To finish second was incredible."

"The one thing I do say is my goal is top six, but I'm going in with no expectations. If I go in saying 'I want to win' your brain is not focused on the correct thing. You're missing the process and focusing on the outcome."

It's important for me to just go out and slide. My body knows what it should do."

The World Cup in Calgary opens with men's and women's skeleton and two-man bobsled Friday. Olympic gold medallist Kaillie Humphries will pilot her two-woman sled and make her World Cup debut as a four-man pilot Saturday.

Vathje won a silver medal at the world junior skeleton championship Jan. 25 in Winterberg, Germany. She's been racing the developmental North American Cup and Europa Cup circuits for several years.

The week prior to her World Cup debut, she won a Europa Cup in Winterberg, the site of the 2015 world championships.

She took up the sport because her father sat near the luge team on a plane from Vancouver when she was 13.

"They got talking and at the time I was too old for luge and too young for bobsled, but perfect for skeleton," she explained.

"It was kind of crazy, but my parents signed off on it."

The World Cup circuit moves to Europe in January. Vathje knows the North American tracks inside and out having slid on them often in the minors. But she's confident in her abilities in Germany, Austria and France because she's raced Europa Cups on those tracks too. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Tough times

Vathje's ascension comes at a difficult time financially for Canada's skeleton team.

- **No veterans.** There are no returning Olympians to the team this winter.
- **Funding dropped.** Own The Podium funding dropped to just $20,000 for 2014-15 from an average of $876,250 between the 2010 and 2014 Winter Olympics.
- **Bank of mom and dad.** Bobsleigh Canada Skeleton will cover travel, accommodation and meals for races, but her coaching, equipment and support-team costs are borne by her and her parents.
- **'Team Vathje'.** Vathje says her mother bakes and sells cookies to defray the cost of her racing.

Post-injury. Vonn hints at ditching slalom for good

Lindsey Vonn in Val d'Isere, France, Thursday. GETTY IMAGES

Lindsey Vonn's days of competing in all five ski disciplines may be behind her, since the four-time overall World Cup champion is seriously considering giving up slalom in her comeback from a career-threatening knee injury.

The 30-year-old American racer thinks she is still somewhat off the pace in speed events, despite clinching her first victory in nearly two years in a downhill at Lake Louise on Dec. 7.

The 2010 Olympic downhill champion thinks ditching slalom may help her cause to become the No. 1 speed racer again.

"I definitely plan on doing (giant slalom), but I want to focus on the speed races right now," Vonn said on Thursday ahead of a downhill and super-G in the French resort of Val d'Isere. "I don't know if I'll do slalom again. It's difficult starting in the back. But we'll see. I haven't skied slalom since my injuries, so I don't know how it feels yet."

Vonn's previous World Cup victory was in GS on Jan. 26, 2013, in Maribor, Slovenia, and she has raced only seven races since. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FIFA. Blatter, execs meet over Garcia's resignation

Amid another crisis at FIFA, president Sepp Blatter and his executive committee opened a two-day meeting Thursday to discuss the sudden resignation of ethics prosecutor Michael Garcia and whether to publish his confidential World Cup report.

Garcia quit Wednesday in protest over the handling of his World Cup bid investigation. The American lawyer's departure could increase pressure on FIFA to publish the 430-page report on the 2010 votes that awarded the World Cup to Russia in 2018 and Qatar in 2022.

The 27 members of the executive committee are split over releasing all or part of Garcia's report, which has led to three of them facing unethical conduct charges.

Garcia's resignation statement on Wednesday was critical of FIFA's slow, tentative steps toward greater accountability, much ballyhooed by Blatter since his unopposed re-election in 2011.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cultural problem

"No ... committee, investigator or arbitration panel can change the culture of an organization."

Michael Garcia upon resigning from his role as FIFA's ethics prosecutor Wednesday

Qatar 2022 World Cup

Labour abuses widespread: Critics

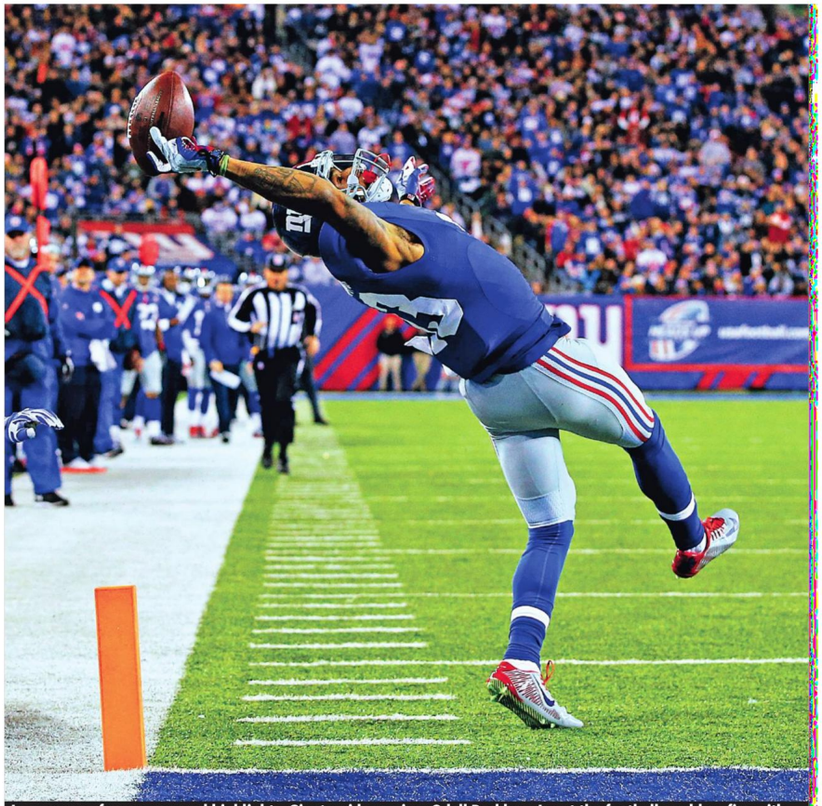
Men are crammed together, dozens to a room, on bunk beds so close they can reach over and shake hands.

Qatar, on paper at least, has rules to protect its massive workforce of migrant labourers. Yet this is how the government-owned transport company, which the Gulf nation will use to ferry visitors around the 2022 World Cup, has housed some workers.

Widespread labour abuses documented by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other critics have blackened its name and $160 billion preparations.

Reporting this April on a fact-finding mission, the UN's special adviser on migrants' rights, Francois Crepeau, cited "anecdotal evidence that too many of these mostly young men return home in a coffin."

Problems, The Associated Press found, extend beyond the construction sector reaching also drivers of buses and taxis. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



In a season of many personal highlights, Giants wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. set the football world on fire with an acrobatic, one-handed catch for a touchdown last month. AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Beckham in line to snag rookie award

The man with the golden hands.
First-year receiver closing in on 1,000-yard season despite missing first four games

Odell Beckham Jr. says being named the league's top rookie doesn't dominate his thoughts.

But it's not far away, either.

"It's always in the back of your mind," Beckham said. "But right now, we've got two more games and whatever happens, happens. You can only control what you can control.

"If it were to happen, it would be quite an accomplishment," he said. "But it's not up to me, so I'll just keep doing what I'm doing."

Beckham is certainly a contender headed into his game at St. Louis on Sunday, based on his last 10 games. If he wins rookie of the year honours, he'd be the first Giant to win the award.

Beckham missed the first four games with a strained hamstring, then debuted Oct. 5 against Atlanta and has been a force ever since, despite the Giants going 5-9.

The first-round draft pick could push his 972-yard total past the 1,000 plateau against the Rams. He is also four catches away from Shockey's club reception record of 74 for rookies.

One more score will give him 10 touchdowns.

League-wide, his numbers are ahead of fellow rookie receivers Mike Evans of Tampa Bay (59 catches for 948 yards and 11 TDs) and Carolina's Kelvin Benjamin (67 catches for 952 yards and nine touchdowns).

His numbers also exceed Buffalo's Sammy Watkins, Miami's Jarvis Landry, and Philadelphia's Jordan Matthews, all of whom have played full seasons.

Beckham highlighted his season with a three-fingered touchdown catch in a Week 12 loss to Dallas.

"When I'm standing on the sidelines, I'm rooting for him all the way," coach Tom Coughlin said. "When I get to Monday, sometimes I run it back an extra time."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Quoted

"The thing I most admire is that he doesn't play like a rookie. He always gets open. He's got a real good connection with Eli (Manning) and it's getting even better." **Giants safety Antrel Rolle** on receiver Odell Beckham Jr.

Demotion

Bears bench QB Cutler vs. Lions

The thought crossed Jay Cutler's mind as soon as he found out he was being benched: He might have played his final game for Chicago.

The Bears announced Thursday that they will start Jimmy Clausen against the Detroit Lions on Sunday instead of the man who signed a massive, seven-year deal at the end of last season. The Bears (5-9) will miss the post-season for the seventh time in eight years.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Not profanity

FCC dismisses 'Redskins' petition

Saying the word "Redskins" on the air isn't obscene or profane — at least not according to the Federal Communications Commission.

The FCC on Thursday dismissed a petition that called for one of the team's flagship radio stations not to have its licence renewed. The petition claimed repeated use of the word "Redskins" violates rules against indecent content.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rams players to attend Ferguson Christmas party

The St. Louis Rams are following through on plans to aid residents in nearby Ferguson.

The five players who did the "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" gesture before a recent home game are scheduled to appear at an Urban League of St. Louis Christmas Party on Friday for residents of Ferguson and north St. Louis County.

Tight end Jared Cook and wide receivers Kenny Britt, Tavon Austin, Stedman Bailey and Chris Givens will attend after practising for the home finale against the New York Giants on Sunday. The group is contributing $10,000 to purchase gloves, hats, socks, underwear, non-perishable food items, detergent, personal hygiene items and 200 coats that will be distributed at the event.

The Rams and the Urban League anticipate attendance of 250 to 300 for a party that will include food and games.

The day after players posed during introductions before the Rams' 52-0 victory over the Raiders, Cook promised the team would do more to help those affected by rioting and protests. There's been much strife in the St. Louis suburb since early August, when Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was fatally shot by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson, who is white.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rams players Stedman Bailey, from left, Tavon Austin, Jared Cook, Chris Givens and Kenny Britt raise their arms in awareness of the events in Ferguson, Mo. L.G. PATTERSON/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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AUGMENTED REALITY

Stuck on 12 Across? Scan this image with your Metro News app for today's crossword and Sudoku answers. It's OK. No one's watching.

→ See the full instructions on Metro's Voices page.

Horoscopes by Sally Brompton

♈ Aries
March 21 - April 20
In trying to find a solution to one problem, don't create several more. If you are not certain you know what you are doing, wait until Monday's new moon gives you a pointer.

♉ Taurus
April 21 - May 21
You will help those who need it today but there is a danger that you will rescue someone who will expect you to help them every time they get in trouble.

♊ Gemini
May 22 - June 21
You will be torn between conflicting duties today and whichever one you choose to prioritize someone is not going to like it. Forget everyone else and put your own needs first.

♋ Cancer
June 22 - July 23
You will be impulsive today and if you make it through to the weekend without emotional drama you will be very lucky.

♌ Leo
July 24 - Aug. 23
Someone in a position of authority will demand that you do things you don't want to do. Go along with what they want but start making plans to put some distance between you.

♍ Virgo
Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Someone will get on your nerves today and if you make it through to the weekend without losing your cool you will have done very well. They don't really mean to irk you.

♎ Libra
Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
If you go after your target too directly or too forcefully today you may find it eludes you. You've got to bide your time and wait for the right moment.

♏ Scorpio
Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
A loved one will demand you spend more time with them today. This is one of those occasions when if you're nice to them now they will be even nicer to you later.

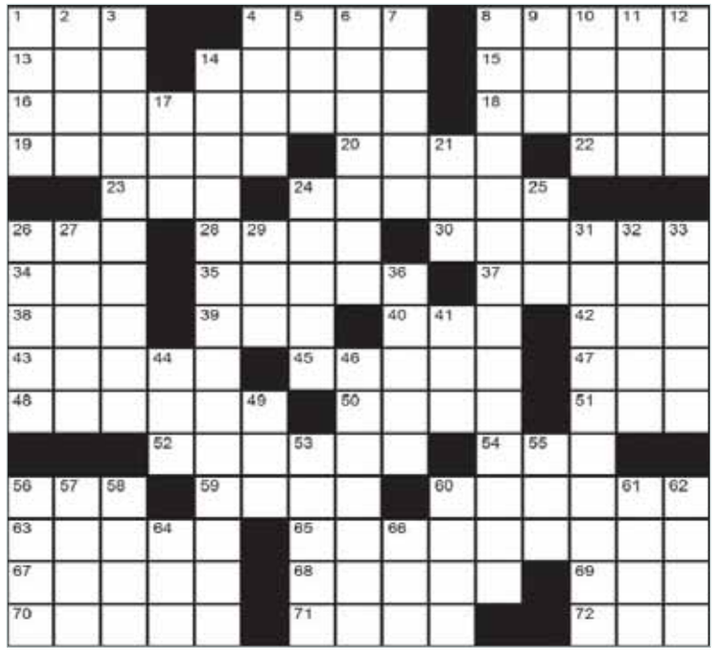
♐ Sagittarius
Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Friends may not be as supportive as you would like them to be but don't let that stop you from pursuing your goals. You don't need anyone to endorse your ambition.

♑ Capricorn
Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
You may think that certain people have got it in for you but more likely it's your imagination. According to the planets you have nothing at all to fear.

♒ Aquarius
Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
If someone you have feelings for spends more time with others than with you today, don't get uptight. Maybe they are trying to make you jealous.

♓ Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
You can use your power to force someone to do your bidding today, or you can use your charm to persuade them to cooperate. The latter will be less problematic.

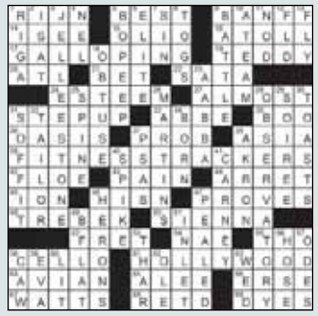
Crossword: Canada Across and Down by Kelly Ann Buchanan



Across
1. Clever
4. Dogs: "Gimme yer..." offerings
8. Become energized: 2 wds.
13. UK toilet
14. Everly Brothers: "Wake Up Little __"
15. Employee's request
16. Yukon/Alaska river; or, Quilly creature
18. CC-138 Twin __ (RCAF search and rescue aircraft)
19. Half-a-cardigan garments
20. R's followers
22. Sleeve
23. Tchaikovsky's 1892 ballet at #31-Down is based on the 1816 tale of this German author, _._._. Hoffmann (b.1776 - d.1822)
24. A-bomb's 'A'
26. "__ voyage!"
28. James __ (Co-writer of Broadway musical Hair)
30. Pineapple: French
34. Approx.
35. Led Zeppelin's Robert
37. Brutal
38. Illinois city, briefly
39. Dr. Melissa __ (Medical Expert on CBC's "Steven and Chris")
40. Parisian pal
42. Literary monogram
43. Canadian actor Mr. Reeves
45. __ diving
47. Crime fighter
48. Rita Hayworth's 1953 title biblical role
50. German-built car
51. __. card (Grades-lister)
52. Blazing
54. Renaissance painter, __ Angelico
56. Hawaiian fish
59. NBA's 'A', briefly
60. Pants
63. Hawaiian island
65. Slick-spilling ship: 2 wds.
67. Awakened
68. E-Mail: Multiple-people-sending
69. Toronto summer hrs.
70. Tale
71. Idol alum Ms. Clarkson, et al.
72. Cape Town's home [acronym]

Down
1. The __ (Famous mountains)
2. Winnie-the-What?
3. Relentless, as rain
4. Bitty Beagles
5. "___ recall..."
6. Sir __ Churchill Square, in downtown Edmonton
7. Tend: 2 wds.
8. Quebec's is known as the 'Fleur-de-lis': 2 wds.
9. Feed
10. Pocket bread
11. Conniver
12. Curls-from-a-box
14. Character in #31-Down: 3 wds.
17. Snip
21. Ethan's ex
24. Singer/songwriter Bryan born in Kingston, ON
25. Driver's need
26. Posh Spice's soccer star hubby David ...his nickname
27. "Romeo and Juliet" (1968) actor Milo
29. Pub serving
31. As per #23-Across... The __ (It's currently being performed by The National Ballet of Canada)
32. Ancient fables guy
33. Snoozed
36. Neutral tone
41. British honour [acronym]
44. Cacharel perfume
46. Decorative moulding
49. Chicago trains
53. "Put _ __ in it!"
55. Sprinted
56. Regrettably
57. Have, archaically
58. Get __ shape (New Year's resolution)
60. Picking-up-passengers places, puny-ly
61. Canvas sneakers brand
62. Mlle. cousin
64. Broadcast
66. Small, shortly

Yesterday's Crossword

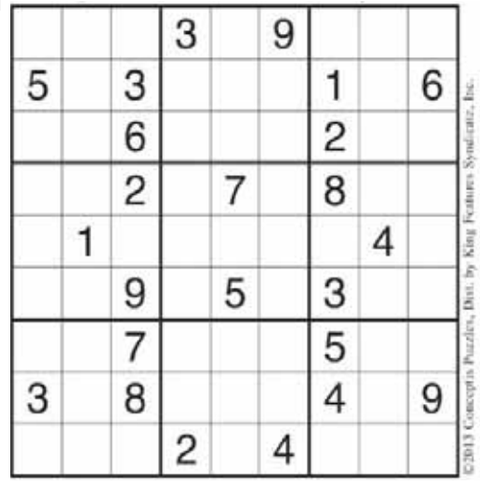


Online

See today's answers at metronews.ca/answers

Conceptis Sudoku by Dave Green

How to play
Fill in the grid, so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved.



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Yesterday's Sudoku

3	4	1	9	5	7	2	8	6
8	7	5	2	6	1	4	9	3
6	2	9	8	3	4	1	7	5
1	6	3	4	8	2	7	5	9
5	9	4	7	1	3	8	6	2
7	8	2	6	9	5	3	4	1
4	1	6	3	7	9	5	2	8
2	5	8	1	4	6	9	3	7
9	3	7	5	2	8	6	1	4

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SOMEBODY'S WORLD

Every time you are presented with an opportunity to bless others, know that the little in your hand is worth millions in the life of someone. Jesus could have left the five thousand to go hungry but for His compassionate heart. While His disciple were considering the cost, He was seeing abundant provision which prompted Him to say, "You give them something to eat." (Mark 6:37 NIV). Somebody needs your attention in this season of Christmas.

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$12,495 — ~~WAS $16,000~~ $47/WK — LEATHER • BLUETOOTH

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2012 KIA RONDO EX AT
97736P

$13,495 — ~~WAS $16,000~~ $49/WK — HTD. SEATS • A/C

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2014 NISSAN VERSA SV AT
97729P

$12,995 — ~~WAS $15,000~~ $42/WK — PWR/ GRP • KEYLESS ENT

2008 HYUNDAI SONATA GL
K55153A

$9,998 — ~~WAS $11,998~~ $45/WK — A/C • BLUETOOTH

2011 TOYOTA MATRIX
K55048A

$11,995 — ~~WAS $13,998~~ $48/WK — AUTO • POWER GROUP

2011 KIA RONDO LX
K15050A

$10,998 — ~~WAS $12,998~~ $48/WK — AUTO • 5 PASSENGER

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- 6 MONTH DENT REMOVAL WARRANTY
- KEY/KEYLESS ENTRY REPLACEMENT WARRANTY
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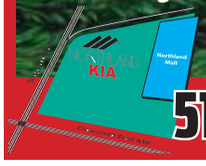
- CAR PROOF INSPECTION REPORT
- OPTIONAL MECHANICAL BREAKDOWN PROTECTION

Happy Holidays from Northland Kia!

All the Best from our Family to Yours this Season.



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*PLEASE READ: ALL OFFERS OAC. ALL REBATES TO DEALER. ALL OFFERS INCLUDE FREIGHT, PDI AND FEES AND EXCLUDE GST. 0.9% RATE AVAILABLE ON KIA CERTIFED UNITS ONLY ON DIFFERENT TERMS. WINTER TIRE OFFER APPLIES TO SELECT KIA CERTIFIED PER-OWNED VEHICLE PURCHASES ONLY. PRE-OWNED WEEKLY PAYMENTS BASED ON $0 DOWNPAYMENT @ 4.25% RATE. TERMS VARY BY MODEL YEAR (2012-13=84 MONTHS; 2010, 11= 72 MONTHS; 2009 AND PRIOR=60 MONTHS) AND EXCUDES FEES, TAXES AND GST. COST OF BORROWING (COB)= $5,396 (27082). PRICES EXCLUDE GST. PRIOR SALES NOT ELIGIBLE. CONDITIONS APPLY. OFFERS END 12/31/14. VEHICLES DEPICTED MAY NOT BE EXACTLY AS SHOWN. INVENTORY ACCURATE AT TIME OF PUBLICATION. SEE DEALER FOR FULL DETAILS.

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0% FINANCING ON CARAVANS, JOURNEYS, DARTS AND CHEROKEES

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$24,498
OR $135/BW • $0 DOWN

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